ALFRED
JULY 35¢
HITCHCOCK'S
MYSTERY MAGAZINE
NEW stories
presented by
the master
of SUSPENSE

Dear Readers,

Once again I take my pen in hand to inform you that Alfred Hitchcock Motion Pictures are better motion pictures—better than what, I am too modest to say. The latest of this better breed is "North by Northwest," starring Alfred Hitchcock, Cary Grant, James Mason and Eva Marie Saint. (The order in which these stars have been listed is purely alphabetical.) Finally, I want to say that this MGM suspense drama will be shown in theatres across the nation, beginning the day before July Fourth, which is, of course, July the Third.

Speaking of Independence Day brings us quite naturally to the cover of this issue. As you know, it is now the time of year that young men and women everywhere are leaving institutions of higher learning. That they have learned their lesson, the provost or warden can only hope. And what is their lesson? Crime does not pay; only getting away with it, does, and then all you have is money.

I shall now put down my pen, and wish you all a shuddering good time with the stories that follow.

Alfred Hitchcock

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CONTENTS

To The Edge Of Murder *by Helen Nielsen* 2

Death Overdue *by Eleanor Daly Boylan* 11

Such Things Happen At Night *by Jack Ritchie* 18

The Actress *by Alex Austin* 22

Letter From A Very Worried Man *by Jay Street* 34

Say It Isn't So, Ruby Martinson *by Henry Slesar* 37

Death Of A V.I.P. *by C. B. Gilford* 46

The Mother Goose Madman *by Betty Ren Wright* 56

Last Drink *by O. H. Leslie* 63

The Murder Was Perfect *by Hans Ruesch* 70

One Crime Too Many *by Douglas Farr* 86

Dark Encounter *by Donald Campbell* 100

Act Of Violence *by Arthur Gordon* 108

Operation Staying-Alive *by William Link and Richard Levinson* 120

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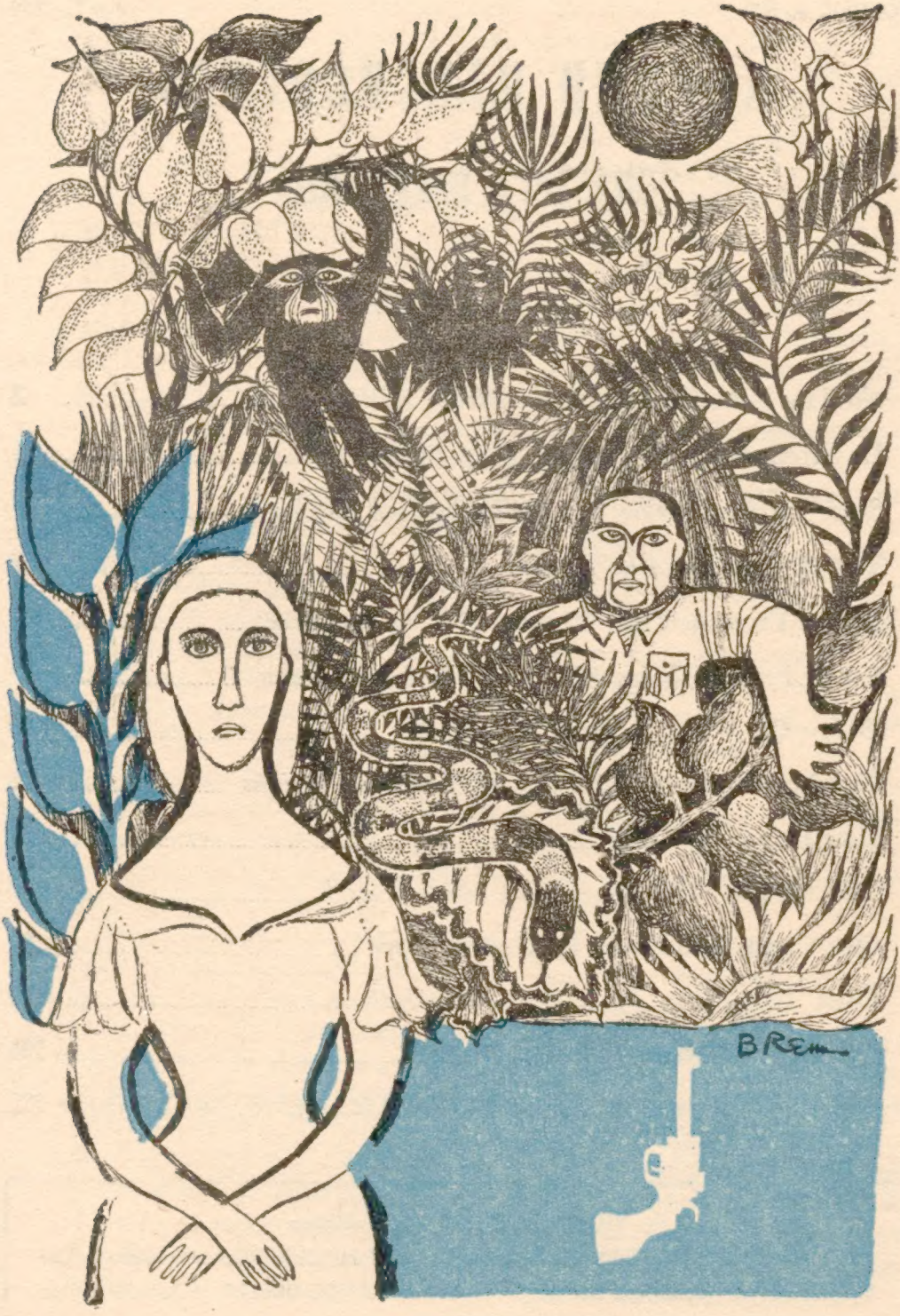

B REM

TO THE EDGE OF MURDER

by Helen Nielsen

KURT STENNER'S head was too massive for his neck. It seemed to obtrude above his wide shoulders more like an eruption than a natural anatomical feature. Militarily erect, he nevertheless gave the appearance of looking down on everyone due to the forward thrust of his head.

He always looked down on Mildred, his wife. His manner might be harsh, or it might be compassionate; but even his rare moments of tenderness were underlined by an unconscious air of possessiveness, as if the love he gave was something bestowed as a reward for good behavior.

He was an upright man, and no one in the Trans-American Construction Company had a finer record of efficiency and achievement. Kurt Stenner could get work out of men who had never worked before; he could build roads through impassable jungle and literally move mountains. His pace never varied, never flagged. He was as regular as the clock on the wall of his office, which now stood at twenty-two minutes before the time he was scheduled to die.

"I've ordered the blasting for ten o'clock," he said. "I always set an exact time, in order for everyone to get clear of the area. We're not far from an Indian village. I don't want any natives injured.

"At exactly ten o'clock, the sound of the blast will cover the gunshot. At exactly ten o'clock,

There is a flavor, a piquancy to murder—in the tropics—which can not be excelled. In northern areas, just that it be fatal—which is really not very much—is all that is asked of murder. Nonetheless, color and pleasure should always be a desideratum everywhere.

Mildred, on the dot, I will die."

Sometimes a white man went mad in the near-equatorial heat. Sometimes it wasn't heat; it was loneliness. But Kurt Stenner wasn't mad. His voice was calm and deliberate, and the slight dampness on his face was only the customary extent of his perspiration. He sat quietly behind his desk, his head and shoulders like a marble bust against the bright window. Mildred Stenner watched him with eyes more curious than terrified.

She said nothing.

"Aren't you worried?" he asked.

She had been a very attractive woman, but nothing stayed fresh in the jungle. A flower cut in the morning was wilted by noon. Mildred Stenner hadn't reached her noon; she'd struggled to avoid it. Her body was still young, but there was an almost imperceptible tiredness about it, as if her senses had accepted a defeat to which her will wouldn't yield. She had clothed it in a dress that was soft and clinging, a pitiful attempt to keep alive an illusion of femininity in a world of sweat and grime. She sat in a chair opposite Kurt's desk and considered his words with studious attention.

"Why are you saying these things?" she asked, at last. "Is this why you called me here through the heat—to tell me this?"

"Apparently my approaching death doesn't unnerve you," Kurt observed. "Isn't that so, my dear?"

"I don't believe you, Kurt."

"You don't believe that my gun is missing?"

Mildred carried a woven bag, one of the colorful ones they had picked up last spring on a holiday in Mexico City. From it she withdrew a handkerchief and patted the perspiration from her face.

"If you say it's missing, why then I suppose it's missing," she responded quietly. "But why is it so important? Why are you so certain the thief is going to kill you?"

"It's the only gun in the camp, Mildred. You know that. I never allow firearms among my workers. One false move, one outburst of temper, and tragedy might follow. But I have to have one gun. One never knows—"

The powerful shoulders arched forward, strained, and pushed the chair away from the desk. They arched forward again, and the chair moved around the corner of the desk until the wheels came into view. Below the huge torso of a once powerful man, the stump of an amputated leg hung beside its healthy member. The chair stopped rolling beside a cage that had a screened front and that stood on a table beside the desk.

Kurt peered into the cage. The sides were of metal, the interior dark and at first glance empty. But as he paused before it, the darkness moved, reflected light, glistened and came alive. Kurt

turned his head in time to catch Mildred's almost imperceptible shudder.

"He expects me now," Kurt said. "He knows when I'm going to feed him and comes to greet me. He hates me, but he needs me."

He took a small glass jar from the table and shook some of the contents down through a sliding opening in the top of the cage. The snake raised its head—low, flat, the red circles glistening along the slowly uncoiling back. A forked tongue flicked out. Two eyes, like twin mirrors of hatred, blazed in the darkness.

"*Gargantilla,*" Kurt murmured. "That's the Indians' name for him. A string of beads. A necklace of death. Well, you were cheated, *Gargantilla.* All you got was my leg. Someone with a gun has to finish the job. Eat your breakfast now. Yes, I know. You want my hand to come closer. You hate me. They hate being confined, Mildred. Do you know that? They hate being restrained."

"I think it's terrible," Mildred said. "Why didn't you kill the snake? Why do you keep it locked in there like a living trophy?"

Kurt placed the insect jar down on the table and turned toward her, smiling.

"I'm entitled to my pleasures, Mildred. I have so few any more. *Gargantilla* took my leg; I take his freedom. That's life. Just a matter of trade. But I'm sorry. You loathe snakes, don't you?"

She had gone a trifle pale, and her eyes hadn't left the snake in the box. Even when Kurt swung the wheel chair about and sat facing her with the box beside him, it was the box that she watched—not him.

Kurt's eyes went to the clock. It was now sixteen minutes before ten.

"Time passes," he observed. "Who do you think it is, Mildred? Who do you think is coming to kill me?"

The room was sticky hot. The light from the window blazed a white hole in the wall, and beyond it, perhaps a hundred yards distant, the sound of workers could be heard loading a truck bound for the tunnel less than a mile away. Mildred looked from the snake box toward the window. The brightness of the light hurt her eyes; but there was a kind of longing in them, as if she, too, hated restraint.

"You may have mislaid the gun," she said.

"Mislaid?" Kurt's mouth smiled humorlessly. "I never mislay things, Mildred. The gun is kept here in my desk. I haven't taken it, but it's gone. No one comes into this room but Hollister and Miguel—" He paused and looked down at the stump of his leg. "—and Dr. Landry. Two men and a boy—each of whom love you and hate me. Which one, I wonder,

hates me the most? Or should I put it the other way—which one loves my wife the most?"

Mildred Stenner no longer watched the snake or the window; now she watched her husband's face. This was more than a query; it was an inquisition. Her hands tightened on the handles of the bag in her lap. Her mouth held firm.

"Miguel." Kurt toyed with the name, as if trying it for size. "Miguelito. Yes, he adores you. A motherless servant boy—a childless woman. A natural situation for jealousy."

"Are you sure the jealousy isn't yours?" Mildred asked. "Miguel is only a child."

"A child?" Kurt echoed. "Not any more. Haven't you noticed? The child is becoming a young man, and young men have intense feelings and wild imaginations. I've watched the way his eyes follow you, Mildred. He wants to protect you. He wants to build an altar and place you on it high above my vulgar reach. He worships you—"

"Kurt—"

"—and hates me. At noon, if I were still to be alive at noon, he would come in with my tray. 'Your lunch, Senor Stenner. Shall I pour your coffee now, Senor Stenner? Is there anything else, Senor Stenner? *Gracias,* Senor Stenner.' All so correct and polite, but his eyes—" Kurt turned toward the cage again. The coral snake raised its head. The beady eyes flashed. "Yes, *gargantilla,* you aren't the only enemy I have. But is Miguel the one? Is a young boy's idolatry enough to motivate murder? What do you think, Mildred?"

Mildred breathed carefully, as if mere respiration might interfere with her concentration on Kurt's words.

"If you're serious about this," she said, "and really think that someone took your gun and means to kill you with it, why don't you have the camp searched?"

Kurt looked at her with mock surprise.

"Now, there's a thought," he said. "Why can't I be as brilliant as my wife? I might be president of the company if I were, and live in a penthouse in New York. You'd like that, wouldn't you, Mildred? You'd like to get out of this godforsaken camp. But where shall we search? The workers barracks? The storehouse? Or shall we just line up the men and ask them, one by one, who took the gun out of my desk and plans to kill me with it?"

"But you don't know that anyone plans to kill you. You only imagine—"

"Imagine?" Kurt smiled thinly. "I'm not a dreamer, Mildred. I never imagine anything—except, perhaps, that one day—"

One hand reached down and

stroked the thigh of the amputated leg.

"Do you remember the day Landry took this off? It was right here in this office. Some of the boys carried me in and laid me on the couch. I'd lost precious time going after my friend here in the cage. I'd trapped him in an empty crate. I intended to kill him until I thought of a better punishment. There wasn't much time—at least, that was Landry's excuse. He operated without an anaesthetic. I watched his face. I think he enjoyed it."

"That's not true!" Mildred protested.

"I think he enjoyed it," Kurt repeated. "I think he would have enjoyed it even more if I had died. It must be a great temptation to a man with the power to legally kill to have his rival at his mercy."

Mildred stirred in her chair.

"Rival!" she repeated. "Because a man talks to me! Because it occurs to him that I have a mind and might want to communicate!"

"Because he loves you," Kurt said brusquely. "Why do you suppose a man with Tom Landry's training stays on in this place? When he first came here, he could talk of nothing but getting back to the states. But his contract was up three months ago, and he hasn't even asked to be replaced. There has to be a reason for that, Mildred. The same reason that was troubling my mind the day I stepped on our caged friend, here. I didn't even see him, not with all his bright colors—"

"There's so much you don't see, Kurt!"

"—and *gargantilla* never strikes, do you *gargantilla?* You're a peaceful creature who burrows in the earth and wants no trouble from anyone—unless you're stepped on."

Kurt leaned toward the cage, and then turned quickly toward his wife.

"Is it Landry?" he demanded. "Is it your lover who's going to kill me?"

Perspiration had formed a glistening film on Mildred's face. She made no move to blot it away. There was anger in her eyes, and yet, hardly so much anger as disgust.

"Why don't you call in Miguel and Landry?" she asked. "Why don't you give them a chance to defend themselves from your accusations?"

"But they may not be guilty, Mildred. That's what our conversation is about. We're trying to identify a murderer. Some men have their murders solved after they've occurred, but my only chance is to solve mine before it occurs. Here I am, a crippled, unarmed man waiting for death to come to me. My only chance of survival lies in anticipating who will appear with that gun in—" Kurt glanced up at the clock on

the wall. "—seven minutes. If I know, I may be able to outwit the killer. Let's say it's to be Miguel. He's an intense, passionate youth. Dangerous, but experience may outwit him. The young frighten easily. Even the threat of hell fire might drive him back.

"But hell fire won't deter Tom Landry. He knows only too well why hell fire was invented. How shall I bargain for my life with Landry?"

Kurt waited for an answer.

"Why do you ask me these things?" Mildred asked. "Why do you want me here at all?"

"Because you're my wife," Kurt answered, "—my helpmeet. Don't you want to help save my life? Since you know Landry so much better than I do—"

"That's not true! None of what you're saying is true! You never let up, do you, Kurt? You never forget—ever!"

Mildred ducked her head, shading the glare of the window from her eyes with one taut hand. Kurt watched her for a few seconds.

"I never forget the picture of my wife in another man's arms," Kurt said quietly.

For a little while there was no sound in the room save the long finger of the clock counting off another minute. Mildred sat motionless, waiting for words that had to follow.

"I thought we would be safe here," Kurt added. "I was foolish enough to believe that if I took you away from temptation the past could be forgotten."

"Kurt—" Mildred raised her head. "—there is no past. There never was. It was nothing—"

"But I suppose a woman like you can't change, can she?" he continued. "You'll make trouble wherever you go. No, Landry's not so simple a problem as Miguel. If he comes through that door with my gun in his hand, I'll have trouble. Can I play on his humanitarian instincts, do you think? Can I remind him of his Hippocratic oath?"

—through that door. Mildred's eyes had followed the words. Now she seemed almost hypnotized, almost in a trance.

"So you're beginning to believe me," Kurt observed. "The gun is really gone, and you're beginning to understand why I called you here to wait with me. It's not that I'm so sorry to leave this world, Mildred; but I'm like *gargantilla.* I don't like to be stepped on. If I'm to be executed, let it be done properly in front of a witness—unless you're so sure I'm imagining the situation that you haven't even the curiosity to wait the few minutes that remain."

She made no move to leave. "I won't go," she said quietly.

"Thank you. It warms my heart to know that my wife holds me in such deep affection. Will you intercede for me, Mildred? But

then, it may not be Landry who comes through the door. It may be Nick Hollister."

Kurt watched Mildred's face for reaction, but it was only a moist mask—waiting.

"Is Hollister the man, Mildred?"

"There is no man," she answered. "There's nothing but your jealousy."

"And my missing gun?"

"You say that your gun is missing."

"And you think I'm lying. Why, Mildred? Why should I bring you here and tell you such a tale? Why should I torture you this way?"

"Why do you keep the snake in the box?" Mildred countered.

Kurt smiled.

"Very good. We do have some understanding, don't we?"

"We have a great deal of understanding," Mildred said, "—now."

For the first time, it was Kurt who appeared puzzled. His frown was brief. His eyes darted toward the clock again; then he leaned forward in the wheel chair.

"Dr. Landry loves you and hates me," he said, "but he's as old as I am. His hair is even grayer. Nick Hollister is much more attractive, isn't he? You noticed that the first time he flew down in the supply plane. You wait each month—"

"Everybody in the camp waits for the plane each month," Mildred protested. "We wait for the mail—"

"—and the mail man. It *is* Hollister. I can see it in your face now, Mildred. I knew if I questioned you long enough you would give yourself away."

He was pleased. His face glowed with perspiration; his eyes gloated over their victory.

Mildred edged forward in her chair.

"There's no one!" she insisted.

"There's a plane on the landing strip, ready to leave as soon as the blasting is finished. You know about that, don't you? Ordinarily, Hollister stays an extra day."

"There's a storm warning," Mildred said.

"A storm warning? Now, isn't that interesting? How did you know about that? I only heard it myself this morning—from Hollister. He's the man, isn't he? I want you to admit it! I want the truth!"

He was glistening. The words were like blows hurled across the few feet that separated them. He'd half raised up in the chair, his hands bracing his heavy torso against the wooden arms.

"The truth—" Mildred spoke the words coldly. "The truth is that *you're* the man," she said. "You're the rival, Kurt. Not Miguel; not Tom Landry; not Hollister—but yourself. You won't let anyone love you. I think you're afraid of love. You want to be a god, not a human being. You drive love away from you and imagine that you have rivals. That's your truth,

Kurt. Are you satisfied now? Do you have your answer?"

He should have become angrier; instead, he smiled. His eyes turned toward the clock. The hands had moved again.

"Thank you, Mildred," he said in a quiet voice. "I have my answer. I know who hates me enough to want me dead. And now my gun, please."

He might have been asking for the handkerchief in her hand.

"In your handbag, Mildred. You didn't really think you could get away with killing me, did you? The timing was right. The blast would cover your fire and the plane would get you away before my body was found, but you won't go through with it. There's a reason—"

And then, as if suddenly startled by some sight beyond Mildred's shoulder, he glanced toward the door. It was only a gesture, but it pulled away her attention for that fragment of time required to hurl a steel box on the floor at her feet. Mildred screamed and leaped from the chair. The gun, already half drawn from her bag, was in her hand. The top of the box was open. The snake crawled toward her and she fired.

The silence after the gunshot was awesome. It was one minute before the blast was to go off.

"Drop the gun!" Kurt ordered.

Mildred stared dully at the coil on the floor.

"Drop the gun. You can't shoot me now. They've heard the shot down at the camp."

Kurt was right. Outside the window, voices were shouting. The shouts came closer.

"Drop it!" Kurt repeated.

"Gargantilla," she said.

"Yes, *gargantilla,* my old friend. He's repaid his debt to me. I knew you had the gun, and I knew I could spoil your timing. Now it's too late. The gun, Mildred—"

Kurt's shoulders thrust forward and the chair moved toward her. He was watching the gun; not until the wheels touched the snake did he look down and see what so held her attention. It wasn't dead. Her shot had gone wild, and *gargantilla* didn't strike until he was stepped on.

As the deadly snake turned toward him, Kurt's frantic eyes sought Mildred. She dropped the gun and went to the door.

Outside, she met a breathless Miguel running toward her. "The snake," she cried. "It's loose. I tried to kill it, but I missed!"

She held him just long enough to make certain. There was time to hear Kurt's cry before the blast.

DEATH OVERDUE

by Eleanor Daly Boylan

"A LIBRARY would make a good setting for a murder," said Allan Gifford pleasantly as Mrs. De Ware stamped his books and accepted a four cent fine. "You know —corpse found in the D to F section, dead hand clutching page torn from book, librarian identifies murderer by tracing book with torn page—"

"I'm glad I'm to be the detective. For a minute I was afraid I was the murderer."

"You're lucky I didn't make you the victim."

Mrs. De Ware laughed, a surprisingly hearty laugh to emanate from a ninety pound frame, thought Gifford with amusement and affection. She was sixty-five and pretty as a pansy, with snow white hair and lively brown eyes. Mrs. De Ware had been the librarian in the town of Stockton since her husband's death ten years before. "I intend to see that you get

A librarian deserves far more, than pennies received for overdue books. Do you realize how difficult it is to get the ink from that stamping pad off one's fingers, and how trying it is to maintain silence while a murder, shall we say, is going on in the reference room?

an anniversary dinner while I'm here this summer," Gifford had told her on his arrival several weeks before. A journalist and occasional writer of detective fiction, he'd taken a cottage in Stockton every July for the past seven years.

"Well, I'd say you have your summer's work cut out. What will you call it— THE BODY IN THE STACKS?" Mrs. De Ware began removing crayon marks from a copy of THE WIZARD OF OZ.

"More likely GIFFORD'S SWAN SONG. I'm through with the clue type."

He leaned against her counter, reluctant to go out into the heat again. He was the only person in the library and they were great friends. The good-natured little librarian had been endlessly obliging, reserving books for him, checking on facts, even sending the sixty miles south to Boston for references and information that her limited stock could not supply.

"Swan song? You're just feeling sorry for yourself. Typical writer's slump. Probably Martha's away."

"She is. Took the kids to visit her mother. No, if I write any more fiction it will be straight stuff. A pox on mysteries. Most sweltering work on earth."

Mrs. De Ware started to say something, then stopped and smiled at two girls who bounced into the library, brown and bare-legged. They waved to her and headed for the magazine racks. She said, in a lowered voice:

"Speaking of mysteries, a rather interesting thing happened just before you came up this year. At least, *I* thought it was interesting and sort of detective story-ish: I was running our annual "No Fine Week." You know, you leave a basket out front and put a notice in the paper inviting people to return books that are long overdue without having to pay any fine. It's a way of corralling a lot of books that you'd probably never see again otherwise. Well, one morning when I emptied the basket, there was a book dated October 18, 1944. Sort of odd and creepy, don't you think?"

"Why, creepy?"

She looked disappointed. "Oh, dear, I forgot you aren't a native. The date wouldn't mean anything to you. That was the day of the Paxton murder. A girl by the name of Dorothy Paxton was—"

"Wait a minute—that name rings a bell . . ." Gifford rearranged his long frame on the counter. "See if I remember: she was drowned—no strangled—found by some lake or other, and there was a fellow she was going to marry. I think they even brought him back from overseas for questioning. But why do I remember her? She was somebody in Stockton—somebody's daughter or sister or—"

"Daughter. The mayor's."

"Of course. Mayor Paxton's daughter. And he raised a hell of a rumpus but there was no conviction, as I recall, was there?"

Mrs. De Ware shook her head, beaming at him. "Now, that is rather interesting and dramatic, don't you think? Especially since that 'some lake or other' where the body was found, is Willow Pool just down the road from here."

"Really?" Gifford laughed. "Too bad the borrower didn't bring the book back on the day it was due instead of fifteen years later. He might have seen the murderer!"

"But that's just the delicious part: Miss Gill, she was the librarian then, used a different system of stamping. She stamped the day that the book was taken *out*. So the person could have seen the murderer after all."

Mrs. De Ware winked at him triumphantly as her telephone rang; she answered, made a note, disappeared into the stacks and returned to say yes, HOW TO RAISE AFRICAN VIOLETS was in and she would reserve it. Gifford looked into space and told himself not to be a fool. This sort of luck didn't happen to him—or to anybody. Million to one stuff. Billion.

"What was the name of the book? Can I see it?"

The librarian stooped and opened a bottom drawer. She produced a discolored volume. "CIVIL DEFENSE: IT'S IMPORTANCE IN YOUR COMMUNITY. Published in 1942. Completely outdated, of course. I didn't even bother to catalogue it again."

"No record, I suppose, of who took it out."

She shook her head. "Not that far back."

Gifford took the book from her and opened the cover. He stared at the faded red ink in which the date was stamped, thinking fondly what a lovely dust jacket it would make . . . . . a skeleton hand holding the date stamp, the red ink running down the page and turning into blood, the title on a library catalogue card, DEATH OVERDUE. Then his journalist's mind jostled the fiction writer impatiently. He said:

"Don't I remember a principal suspect, somebody they almost convicted?"

"Yes. A man named Ralph Addison. He died just last year."

"Has he any relatives? Anyone I can see?"

Mrs. De Ware looked alarmed, then severe. "Now, Mr. Gifford, I didn't tell you all this so you could go poking around town asking questions. You were in the dumps and I told you about the book to try and give you a lift. I'll be very cross if you embarrass me by—"

"May I just keep the book for a few days?"

"You may not." She plucked it from him and dropped it back into the drawer.

"Well, at least tell me some more about the Paxton murder."

"No, sir."

"You're a fine one. Get me all interested and curious and then clam up. I won't hurt your precious reputation. I won't even mention your name. Please let me take the book for—"

She shook her snowy head vigorously and turned to her card file. Gifford smiled and strolled to the door.

"If I find out anything interesting, I'll take you to dinner and tell *you* about it."

Mrs. De Ware did not deign a reply. She had walked over to where the girls were reading magazines and was chatting with them, her back to him.

The library, which occupied a low frame building together with the post office, was at the very end of a side street off Stockton's main thoroughfare. Beyond it were fields, a small pond called Willow Pool and the beginning of farmland.

Gifford stood on the library steps, deliciously envisioning someone else standing there fifteen years before, holding a book on civil defense and idly noticing a passer-by, the color of a dress, the movement of a passing car. Was there a hazy or disregarded fragment of memory in the mind of someone in Stockton that could just mean . . .

"You're punchy from the heat," he chided himself. Well, this was his vacation, his family was away and if he wanted to squander a few days, it was cheaper anyway than golf.

From alternate baking sun to harboring shade, Gifford walked to the corner of Main Street and waved to Captain Nichols through the window of the barber shop. Stockton's elderly fire chief was just getting out of the chair and Gifford waited till he came out onto the street.

"Hello, Nick. Say, tell me something. I'm writing a story set around the time of World War II, and I want some information on how civil defense might have been run in a small town. Know anybody who could help me?"

The hale, leathery-faced fire chief grinned. "Bernie Waterfield would be your man. He was in charge of the whole thing for Stockton. Little Caesar, we used to call him."

"Took it pretty seriously?"

"Oh, Lordy. All over town with the helmet and the arm band and the rest of the gear. Lecturing people on how to detonate a bomb and and all that. I remember back during the Paxton trial, Bernie was screaming that there shouldn't be so many 'important officials under one roof.' Drove you crazy. But I suppose somebody had to do what he did."

Gifford seized his break. "That

Paxton trial must have been something."

"Yeah, we were really on the map that year. Lot of the big names are gone now. Mayor Paxton's dead and Ralph Addison—"

"What sort of fellow was he?"

"Ralph? Not a bad guy, really. Kinda silly. Thirty-five and still a girl-crazy bachelor. He was chasing Dotty Paxton while her boy friend was in the service. Ralph was the last person seen with her the morning of the murder; they found her body late that afternoon. But then, a lot of fellows were after Dotty. She was the prettiest thing in town. I'm heading over to the diner. Come along?"

"Thanks, Nick, but I think I'll get right over and see Waterfield. Owns the drug store, doesn't he?"

Nichols nodded and Gifford strolled the half block to the pharmacy, debating his approach. He longed to ask Waterfield point blank if he had taken the book out of the library on that fateful day. But this would almost certainly mean a discussion of its delayed return which could embarrass Waterfield and involve Mrs. De Ware. No, he had promised her he would be circumspect.

Next best, then, was the "I'm writing a story" tactic he had used with Nichols. How those words covered a multitude of snoopings, grinned Gifford to himself as he turned into the welcome coolness of the drug store. He would edge as close to the subject as he could, and hope that Waterfield was a talker.

The soda fountain was crowded, but there was no one at the prescription counter. Gifford was greeted by Bernie Waterfield himself, a big, fleshy man in his sixties.

"My name's Allan Gifford. Could you fill out a prescription for a murder story?" Then he laughed at the other's astonished face. Waterfield began to smile doubtfully.

He said: "I hear *you're* the fellow who fills those out. Can't say I've read any of your stories. I'm not much on detective stuff."

"Tell you my problem if you have a minute." Gifford rested his palms against the counter edge. "I'm working on a fictional account of the Paxton murder. That is, I'm using the basic facts of the crime, but dressing it up with imaginary characters and events. One of my ideas is to make a principal witness out of the man who runs civil defense in the town, as I know you did. Now, on the day of the murder, this fellow goes to the post office to put up some air raid signs. I have him go to the post office because it's right down there by the library, you know, not far from Willow Pool where—"

The telephone in his work room rang and Waterfield, whose face had grown increasingly disapprov-

ing, excused himself. Minutes passed and he did not return. Then a boy appeared to say that Mr. Waterfield was very busy and could not talk to Mr. Gifford any more that day.

Disappointed, Gifford ordered a strawberry soda and pondered his change of luck. Had he been too flip? Small town citizens are inclined to be proud of their local color and the Paxton case had been big stuff and no joking matter. If Waterfield were the humorless, officious character he'd been described as, Gifford could practically hear him telling the town that that "writer-fellow" was going to rig up a story about the Paxton murder, adding a lot of trimmings and foolishness. Or perhaps Waterfield did not relish himself in the role of a chief witness, even in an imaginary capacity. Or had Gifford appeared to make light of the glorious trappings of civil defense?

Gifford walked home, determined now to play it straight. He needn't involve Mrs. De Ware; after all, the Paxton facts would be a matter of public record. At his cottage, he made a list of acquaintances, tradespeople and officials of Stockton old enough to have reliable memories of the event. Then he telephoned the drug store and Waterfield answered.

Gifford identified himself. "I'm afraid I gave the wrong impression just now, Mr. Waterfield. The fact is, I'm very seriously interested in the Paxton case and as far as I'm able, I intend to try and reopen it. Some rather interesting new evidence has come to light (heaven forgive him, but he had to capture the interest of these people if he expected to get anything from them) and I have before me a list of persons that I intend to call and ask for interviews. I wonder if you could give me twenty minutes tomorrow morning. I promise it won't be any longer."

There was a pause, then Waterfield said heavily: "Any time tomorrow," and hung up.

Gifford made a half dozen more calls and lined up four appointments for the next day, appointments he was never to keep.

For the next morning's STOCKTON EAGLE carried screaming headlines of the suicide of Bernard Waterfield. He had shot himself, leaving a written confession to the murder of Dorothy Paxton. As he read, stunned, Gifford's eye caught and fixed on one phrase in the account, and deep pity welled in him for little Mrs. De Ware.

That evening, still glowing from the praise of his editor, Gifford sat with Mrs. De Ware at a quiet table of the Lord Jeffrey Inn at Amherst. Her eyes were red from weeping and Gifford occasionally patted her hand and told her to eat up like a good girl.

"After all," he smiled, "this is a celebration for both of us. But I do

wish you'd told me right at the start that Ralph Addison was your brother."

"Poor darling. To have his name exonerated at last. You don't know what it means."

"Admit that you deliberately baited me with that book, knowing I'd react like a bloodhound."

She nodded, giggled and sipped her coffee. Then her eyes grew sombre. "For fifteen years I've felt sure that Ralph was innocent. And he knew that I believed in him, but it didn't help very much. Even though they couldn't convict him, the cloud never lifted. You can imagine what it was like, right up to the day he died."

"I can. It must've been tough. Did you ever suspect Waterfield at all?"

"Yes. From the beginning."

"Why?"

She fixed her eyes on her plate. "Bernie courted me when we were both young. I knew the sort of man he was . . ."

After a moment, Gifford said: "Then, of course, the book coming back with that date on it must have cinched it for you. But why on earth wouldn't you let me *take* the book? You were driving me out to do your dirty work, why deprive me of an important piece of evidence?"

A waiter handed them dessert menus and withdrew. Mrs. De Ware studied hers intently. "Apple pie, fudge sundae, honeydew melon . . . Because there wasn't any evidence. There wasn't any book returned with the murder date on it . . . Indian pudding . . . walnut layer cake . . . strawberry—"

"But you told me—"

Mrs. De Ware smiled at Gifford's perplexity. "That book on civil defense was in a crate that we received from an estate last spring. When I saw the title, it reminded me of Bernie; he'd made such a nuisance of himself over the whole program. I began to think of how I might use it to expose him if he was guilty. I had the idea to rig the date. You should have seen me trying to make it look old and faded. The next step was to pick the right moment for putting you on the scent. Oh, goody, here's my favorite: lemon meringue pie."

SUCH THINGS HAPPEN AT NIGHT

by Jack Ritchie

It was five in the morning when I opened the big rear door for ventilation. I sat down on some cases of canned milk and lit a cigarette.

The tall thin man stepped out of the alley darkness and into the doorway.

I should have told him that he had no business in here, but the bulge in his side pocket meant something, and I waited.

He closed the door behind him and dropped the latch. His smile was thin. "I've been waiting since one o'clock."

I took the cigarette out of my mouth. "What is it, Mister?"

His hand didn't move to the pocket, but it could be there in a second. "How much would be in that safe in the front of the store?"

"I wouldn't know."

"Like ten thousand?"

"I've no idea. Nobody lets me handle it."

His eyes went over me. "What are you around here?"

"The night stock boy," I said.

He grinned. "Not much of a job for a big man like you."

"It keeps me out of trouble."

He took the gun out of his pocket now.

I ground out my cigarette. "What am I supposed to do? Give you the combination?"

He rubbed the .45 on the side of his pants leg. "That's a nice way of calling me stupid. I don't expect anything from you, stockboy. What time does the manager get here?"

"About seven-thirty."

"And when's the store open?"

"Eight. That's when the clerks show up."

He sat down and his eyes flicked to his watch. "Tell me about stockboys. We got time."

I shook another cigarette from my pack. "When the store closes at nine, nine P.M., I start my work. I unload a semi and when it goes away, I spend the rest of the night and morning stamping the cans and putting them on the shelves."

"A real brain-busting job."

"I eat."

He played with the automatic snap clip in and out. "You through for the day?"

"Taking a break. I got one aisle and the window display to do yet."

He took off his suitcoat and hat and slipped into one of the white aprons from the wall hook. He put the .45 in his back pocket. "Don't let me keep you from earning your pay."

We walked out into the store.

"I thought you were about through," he said. "The place is a mess."

"Just empty boxes," I said. "I clean them up the last thing." I moved to aisle 5. "This is the one I haven't finished yet."

I picked up the hook knife. "This is just for boxes. It isn't good for anything else."

He shrugged. "I wasn't worried. Use it." He leaned on one of the shelves and watched me slash open three sides of a carton.

I turned the wheels of my rubber stamp and began putting the prices on the tops of the cans.

After fifteen minutes he spoke. "How come you remember all the prices?"

"I'm good with numbers," I said. "I always remember."

"I don't care much for numbers."

I thought I knew what he meant, but I didn't say anything.

"How are you on faces?"

I inked the stamp carefully. "I can't even remember what my brother looks like. When I don't want to."

His laugh was low.

I looked at him. "I don't own any stock in the company. Why should I remember a face? You could come back."

Outside the store a man with a lunch pail stopped and looked in.

The tall man began putting cans on a shelf. "What does he want?"

"Nothing," I said "A lot of people go to work around this time."

When we were alone again, the tall man tossed a can back into the carton. "I wasn't cut out to be a stockboy."

"Who the hell was?"

He laughed. "At least you don't like it. That's something."

I changed the price tags on a shelf edge. "There's a cop goes by here every morning around 6:30."

He stiffened.

"Just goes by," I said. "It's routine."

His voice was soft. "If I get hurt, you'll bleed worse"

There is nothing quite like spending a night talking to a robber bent on robbery. Everything is so serene and yet dramatic. And the conversation is not idle chitchat; it probes the ethical problems of our times.

"I know."

He relaxed. "Think you'll be a stockboy long?"

I looked at him. "Why not?"

He grinned. "You weren't supposed to open that back door? Against regulations?"

I wiped my hands on the apron, and said nothing.

He chuckled. "What's to worry you? There's a thousand jobs better than this one."

His eyes went to the safe in the front of the store and he might have been talking to himself. "All small stuff. No big bills to worry about. No marked money. No serial numbers on somebody's list."

It was after dawn when Larkin stopped in front of the show windows. He rubbed the back of his neck with his nightstick and yawned.

The tall man and I were at the end of the aisle near the window.

He got busy putting cans on the shelves. "What do you do? Wave to him, or something?"

"He doesn't expect it from me." But I looked at Larkin and the badge above his big belly and nodded.

Larkin moved on and the tall man stopped working.

"He'll be back," I said. "He has a cup of coffee at the all-night restaurant down the street. Then he comes back this way to put in his call at the corner box."

"Play it easy," the tall man said. "Remember I'm here."

I lit a cigarette and watched the smoke drift up.

"You're strong on taking breaks," he said.

I came out of my thoughts, and hand-trucked a dozen cases of tomato juice to the narrow display shelf under the show windows.

The tall man moved down the aisle and glanced idly at the shelves.

I turned the wheels of my stamp to the right number and began marking the big No. 3 cans.

I finished in twenty minutes and was staking empty cartons behind the cash register when Larkin came by again.

He stopped at the display. Then he looked up at me.

I picked up the wide push broom and began cleaning up the aisles.

When I looked up, Larkin was gone.

At quarter after seven I put away the broom and took off my apron.

"What now?" the tall man asked.

"Nothing. I'm through. I leave when the manager gets here."

He grinned. "Not this time."

Morrison was five minutes late. It was seven thirty-five when he unlocked the front door.

The tall man stepped out of a blind spot near the door. He held the automatic so that no one passing could see it. "The safe, Mister."

Morrison's face got white and he didn't argue with the gun.

We moved past the row of cash registers and around the stack of hundred pound bags of sugar.

Morrison's fingers shook. but I watched him get the combination the first time.

The tall man hefted the gray canvas sacks inside the safe and took the ones with the paper in them. He picked a ball of heavy twine off a shelf and waved the gun. "Get to the rear of the store."

In the back room, he tossed the twine to me. He indicated Morrison. "Tie him up and make it fast."

When I was through with Morrison, it was my turn.

The tall man didn't do a good job on me. I knew I could get free in five minutes. But that wouldn't matter to him. All he wanted was a little time.

When he was through, he looked down at us and his grin was satisfied. He opened the back door.

They were waiting for him.

Larkin and a half a dozen others.

I could see the tall man's back stiffen as he looked into the ring of .38's.

Then his hands went up and the two gray bags under his arm dropped to the floor.

It was after nine before I could slip into my jacket and get ready to go.

"I'll be sure to bring this to the attention of your parole board, Willie," Mr. Morrison said.

I pulled the zipper up. "Thank you, Mr. Morrison."

"I believe in giving a man a break," he said. "And it paid off. Willie, you saved the company over fifteen thousand dollars."

A couple more reporters came into the crowded store and Larkin started his story again.

"The first thing I noticed," he said, "was that all the tomato cans in the window were upside down."

"There'll be a reward for you, Willie," Mr. Morrison said. "The last time something like this happened, the company gave out five hundred dollars."

"Thank you, Mr. Morrison," I said.

Larkin was still talking. "And when I looked closer, there was my badge number stamped on every one of them cans." He tried to look modest. "So I put two and two together."

I put on my cap.

Morrison patted my shoulder. "We'll see you tonight. Regular time."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Morrison," I said. "I'll be back at nine."

I smiled as I walked past the safe. Thank you, Mr. Morrison, for showing me the combination. Thirty to the right, one full turn left and stop at sixteen...

I lit a cigarette at the bus stop.

It would be good to get my hands on some real money again. About fifteen thousand dollars of it.

Once you have caught a bad case of theatre, it is most difficult to get over it. Even bad reviews, looked at frequently, will not help one iota. As for homicide, as an outlet, it helps some and not others.

★ THE ACTRESS ★

by Alex Austin

PAUL CARGO'S single ambition in life was to marry a very beautiful actress.

Emma Duvale's single ambition in life was to marry a very rich man.

It was, therefore, one of life's happier coincidences that both Paul Cargo and Emma Duvale were present at a dinner party given by Charles Malcolm Hennessy in honor of his sister Elizabeth's forthcoming marriage to a red-headed count by the name of Victor Bercy.

Within ten minutes after being introduced to each other, Paul Cargo knew he had found his very beautiful actress and Emma Duvale knew she had found her very rich man.

When singular and perfectly harmonious ambitions meet, they, apparently, lead to very quick results. Paul Cargo and Emma Duvale were married just nine days after Hennessy's dinner party.

They made a charming couple. They went to Florence and Venice for their honeymoon. And when their honeymoon was over, they spent the next year taking a very leisurely trip around the world.

During this trip, Paul Cargo discovered a most delightful side of his wife's character. She was not only a good actress; she was, it would be safe to say, a truly great one. She could be a queen for him one night, a girl of the Paris streets the next, and on the third she might be a coy Japanese maid.

Paul was simply charmed by his wife's various portrayals. It was actually like having all the pleasures of a harem with only the responsibilities of an ordinary marriage.

In Cairo, however, Paul Cargo ran into a rather disturbing side of his wife's character. He was sitting in the bar of their hotel one night. His wife had gone to bed; she was not feeling very well. She told him it was nothing to worry about; a good night's sleep was all she really needed.

After Paul Cargo had finished three gin and bitters, a young Egyptian woman sat down on the stool next to his. He noticed her first in the long mirror behind the bar. She was a striking woman, with long black hair and eyes that were slanted just enough to lend an Oriental flavor to her beauty.

Paul Cargo had another gin and bitters and just as he was ordering his fifth, the young Egyptian Lady dropped her purse. He bent down and picked it up for her. She thanked him. He was very kind, she said.

"Would you care to join me in a drink?" Paul Cargo asked her. The words seemed to come from him almost automatically. He was actually surprised to hear himself ask such a question. And he thought immediately about his wife who was asleep upstairs.

The young Egyptian lady smiled in a softly sensuous manner. She would be delighted to join him.

It was a perfectly innocent thing to do—to ask a charming lady to have a drink with you. They would talk. And then he would return to his room.

But, of course, life is never as simple or as innocent as we try to make it.

They did drink together and thet did talk and Paul Cargo did return to his own room. But on his way to his own room, he spent close to two hours in the room of the charming Egyptian lady.

The next morning his wife said nothing about the previous evening. Paul Cargo did not say anything either—not even when he saw a long black wig on his wife's dressing table.

When they returned to the United States, after their year of traveling, Paul and Emma Cargo became one of the most popular young couples on the North Shore. They gave the most extravagant and imaginative parties. They were constantly being mentioned in all the gossip columns.

They lived a most happy life for the next three years. But not since the night of the Egyptian lady did Emma Cargo over play another part for her husband.

Ever so often, after a few drinks, Paul Cargo would ask his wife when she was going to act for him again.

"It's been a long time since I've been entertained by the Princess of Roumania or a little Paris street girl," he told her.

"Not now, darling," Emma would always say. "Perhaps next week we'll do that."

The only time Emma Cargo did

not seem to be the happiest of women, was when she and her husband would attend the theatre. She invariably said, "I'm a bit tired, darling, that's all."

What Emma Cargo did not tell her husband was what she did on these nights, when they got home, and she would go off to the room they had set aside as her "Theatre Room." It was understood between them that this was Emma's very private room, just as "The Study" was Paul's very private room.

In the Theatre Room, Emma Cargo would take out her scrapbooks and go through them one by one.

Now Emma Cargo had never been what one could really call a successful actress. She had played several seasons of summer stock, in Bucks County, just outside of Liberty in the Catskill Mountains and at the Pasadena Playhouse. And here, in all sorts of roles, she had been very well received by the local critics.

As soon as she took to the professional boards, however, her luck seemed suddenly to have deserted her. Her first play, an import from Paris, in which she received excellent notices, closed after three performances. Her second and third plays ran one week and eleven days respectively—even though she received fine personal notices in each of them.

And finally, when she was given what seemed like her long-awaited "big break"—the lead in a murder mystery that had played two years in London, she received uniformly bad notices. A sample of these notices was the one by Willoby Wills in the Manhattan Magazine. It read as follows:

> "Miss Emma Duvale was so utterly unconvincing as a murderess, that if she even so much as killed a turkey for Thanksgiving dinner, I am quite sure the bird would stand up the very instant he was placed on the table and would strut off just as live as you please."

When she had first married Paul Cargo, Emma had been able to forget her theatrical ambitions. She had been able to satisfy herself with the little games she had played with her husband. He was such a perfect audience. And she did have to admit to herself that part of her love for him was for just this reason—that he *was* a perfect audience.

Then, of course, there had been the night of the Egyptian lady, and Emma had felt no desire to act after that terrible incident.

But, in time, the old calling sounded again in her blood. And she knew that now it would not be satisfied merely with a night of portraying this one or a night of that one. All that had been like her weeks in summer stock. Emma Cargo slowly began to think of

herself as a great actress who had never had a hit.

She spent months and months thinking of a way she would be able to have her hit. She cast aside all sorts of plans, kept making new ones.

And then, on the eve of their fourth anniversary, Emma Cargo told her husband that she would so much like to take another trip around the world. They had, after all, traveled very little during the last three years.

"I didn't know you wanted to travel," Paul Cargo said. "If you do—then, of course, we will, my dear. We'll leave the first of next week. I'll have Harrison close up the house. Now, how's that, eh?"

Emma Cargo kissed her husband. He was the very best husband in the world. That's what she told him.

And the first of next week, at 9 A.M., Monday morning, with the April sun almost as warm as summer, Paul and Emma Cargo were on board the Liberte, bound for Le Havre.

It was on board ship that Emma put her little plan to Paul.

The had been married four years now, and Emma explained to her husband that this was a dangerous stage they were going through. Paul laughed. But Emma said quite seriously, "I've heard of so many divorces occuring during this period."

And then she explained her plan. It was to put new life into their marriage. She did have to admit that she was becoming somewhat bored. And what she wished to do was to become another woman.

Paul Cargo sat back, a glass of Moet & Chandon, 1942, in his hand, and he was completely mystified. His round, rather soft face had the look of a child being suddenly addressed in a foreign language.

"You want to become a new woman?" he asked his wife.

Emma smiled, took hold of his hand. "You remember," she said, "how I always used to play different women for you?"

"You mean that's all . . ."

"No," she said. "I don't mean the way I used to do it."

"Then just what do you mean?"

"Well, now I want to become a new woman—but not just for a night," she explained. "I want to become a new woman for a year, for two years—even longer if we both like her."

Paul frowned, shook his head slowly. He placed his glass on the table. "Nonsense," he muttered.

They argued for a few minutes and then Paul Cargo shrugged a little helplessly, told his wife she could do what she pleased, if it would make her happy Thereupon, he ordered two more bottles of champagne; and they both became very drunk that night.

Emma did not become this new woman on board ship. It would

have been too noticeable there. But when they stepped off the boat train in Gare du Nord in Paris, Emma Cargo was no longer a beautiful blonde American lady. She was a very French-looking, saucy, but elegant brunette, and Paul was absolutely amazed at the transformation because this was certainly the most accomplished act she had ever put on. It was even better than the Egyptian lady in Cairo.

Well, Paul and Emma Cargo traveled all over Europe and, during this time, Emma was Madeleine Bernard. Even when they were alone together, she spoke French a good part of the time. And what English she did speak was always in a French accent.

Paul Cargo was thoroughly intrigued by his wife's portrayal. It seemed almost too marvelous for him to believe. Day after day, he was astounded by her skill. Her smallest mannerisms were keyed to this new woman, the way she walked, the way she held her head a little to one side when she listened to someone else speaking, the way she had of emphasizing words with her hands flitting about in the air like tiny lost birds—all of these mannerisms that had never been any part of Emma Cargo.

It was in Cannes, while they were both lying on the beach there, that Emma Cargo put the second part of her plan to her husband.

Now, she not only wanted to be Madeleine Bernard; she wanted Emma Cargo to be dead.

Paul Cargo merely laughed at her suggestion, closed his eyes and listened to the soft murmuring of waves breaking on the white sand.

"But, darling," Emma said, leaning over him now, removing her dark glasses. "Don't you see what a . . . triumph it will be? If you write home and tell them I have died—that I've been drowned, let's say—then I can return to you as Madeleine Bernard. Why, no actress in the world has ever faced such a challenge."

"It's a bit too grisly for my tastes," Paul said.

"Now don't be an old spoilsport," Emma said.

"It's not exactly sport to write your friends that your wife has died," he said.

"But we'll tell them the truth in time," Emma said "We'll just play our little trick for . . . well, for a few weeks. Then we'll have an unveiling party and I promise you I'll never want to act again as long as I live. After such a triumph, one could never hope to do anything better."

Paul Cargo continued for two days to tell his wife that her plan was completely absurd; then on the third day, he sent a telegram to Harrison Jackson, his closest friend, telling him that Emma had been drowned off Antibes when they had gone fishing. The tele-

gram asked Harrison to place an announcement in the papers. It concluded by saying that he, Paul, was going to remain in Europe for several more months.

In six months, Paul Cargo and Madeleine Bernard walked down the gangplank of the Liberte in New York. She had even managed to buy a forged passport from an Arab in Paris for two-million francs.

Harrison Jackson, Blakely Thomas, Siggi Austerlitz, Susan Reider and a number of other friends were on hand to welcome Paul.

When Paul introduced them to Madeleine Bernard, they all seemed a bit surprised. They had expected to extend their condolences to Paul. And now they found themselves congratulating him, when they heard his announcement that he and Madeleine Bernard were going to be married in two month's time.

In less than a week, Madeleine Bernard was the talk of the North Shore. The men spoke of her as being a startling beauty, and, of course, a French one at that. The women were more moderate in their praise of her physical charms; they pointed up the fact that she was obviously an extremely shrewd woman and also that it would be wise to keep an eye on all husbands concerned.

It was not until the third week after their arrival in New York that the talk began—the talk being about the possibility that Emma Cargo had been murdered. No one knew really where it had started. Of course, no one believed a word of it.

But even at the wedding of Paul Cargo and Madeleine Bernard, several of the guests mentioned the rumors they had heard. Each of them pointed out that it was absurd to think such a thing could be true, but wasn't it strange that someone would want to start such a rumor in the first place.

Paul Cargo kept insisting, at least twice a week, that his wife stop this damned joke and tell everyone who she really was. And Emma would always say, "Just a little longer, cheri. I am having so much fun, you know?"

When they were married three months, they decided to have a private celebration at home. Madeleine prepared an excellent Bouillabaisse de Pompano Madelon. She told Paul it was an old specialty with her family. And he laughed and told her that actually he was finding it quite a delightful experience being married to a French girl. "You make much better wives than Americans do," he said.

"You are sweet, cheri," Madeleine said and she kissed him lightly on the mouth.

And that night, just as he was rolling over onto his own side of the bed, Paul Cargo admitted to himself that he actually loved this

Madeleine Bernard much more than he had ever loved Emma. As beautiful as Emma had been, she had never been as exciting or, oddly enough, even as intelligent as Madeleine was.

Paul debated with himself, for some time, as to whether he could possibly tell his wife that he wanted her to remain Madeleine. Would it flatter her to think she had created such a marvelous character, or would it hurt her to think he loved her mask more than he loved her? Paul turned over these questions in his mind for several weeks, and he could come to no satisfactory solution.

That's why when two detectives came to talk to Paul Cargo one Thursday morning, he was somewhat relieved that they had made his decision for him.

He was a little startled at first when they told him they had received several anonymous notes, claiming he had murdered his first wife in France. When they mentioned Emma by name, he did not think of Madeleine. They had become two different women in his mind.

"I'm afraid we've had to check with the Antibes police," one of the detectives said. He looked a little embarrassed when he told this to Paul.

As soon as he heard this, however, Paul Cargo's mind cleared and he smiled. Then he laughed, slapping his knees. The two detectives looked at him as if he were mad.

"Gentlemen, can I offer you a drink?" he asked them.

They thanked him, but said they didn't care for anything.

"Well then," Paul said, "I'll tell you the story without a drink if that's how you want it."

And he proceeded to tell them the story of exactly how everything had happened. He told them of the little games he and his wife had played during the first year of their marriage. He even told them about the dark-haired lady in Cairo, and he was a bit surprised when the two detectives did not laugh at this. They sat there with dull faces, like two men whose wit had been wrapped away in cotton.

But Paul continued with his story.

When he finished, the first detective, a bony, bald man with clear gray eyes, asked if they might talk to Mrs. Cargo.

Paul called Emma. There was no answer. He called her again. He knew very well she was sunning herself on the patio.

Then, without quite realizing what he was doing, he called her by her other name—Madeleine. She appeared promptly, dressed in her white terry-cloth robe and her black sandals.

The gray-eyed detective explained to Madeleine just why they were there. She seemed very surprised. She turned pale. She sat

down. She looked over at her husband rather strangely.

"We're very sorry to have to go into all this," the gray-eyed detective said. "But I'm sure you understand our position."

"Ah ... *certainement* ... certainly," Madeleine said.

The two detectives looked at each other.

"Emma, for God's sake, stop this French, will you," Paul said. "The joke is over."

"Mon dieu .. c h e r i ... w h a t French do you wish me to stop? I do not understand," Madeleine said with a completely bewildered expression on her face.

"Emma—these men are trying very politely to tell you they suspect me of murdering *you,*" Paul said.

"Not you, Mrs. Cargo," the detective said. "The first Mrs. Cargo."

"She *is* the first Mrs. Cargo," Paul said impatiently.

Madeleine looked from one to the other, as if she did not understand just what was going on.

"You *are* the second Mrs. Cargo, aren't you?" the detective asked her.

Madeleine nodded a bit hesitantly. She glanced over at her husband. *"Oui,"* she said. "I am his second wife."

"But you're my first wife too," Paul said. "Now stop this nonsense, will you?"

"I am your first wife?" Madeleine asked him. "I do not understand, *cheri."*

"Look! Damn it—I said ..." But Paul stopped. He relaxed suddenly. He looked at his wife and then at the two detectives. Slowly, a smile crossed his lips. "I'll have to admit," he said, "you did have me g o i n g. You and your actor friends." Then he laughed and flopped down on the sofa. "You really had me going there," he said.

"Mr. Cargo," the gray-eyed detective said, "I'm afraid you've got this all wrong. This is no joke we're playing."

Paul Cargo watched, listened, still smiling. He nodded. "Go on," he said.

"You see, Mr. Cargo," the detective continued, "we've already checked with Antibes. The police there have found the man who took you out fishing. I'm sorry to have to tell you that he's confessed the whole thing. The easy sort to work with—you look at him and he comes right out with it to save his own skin."

"Good, good," Paul Cargo said, nodding, smiling. "What else?"

The detective looked over at his companion a moment. Then he took a black leather case from inside his coat pocket. He opened the case and showed Paul Cargo his badge. "You can't very well rent one of these," he said.

Paul's smile faded slowly. He looked around at his wife. She

seemed very, very frightened.

"The fisherman's told the police in Antibes" the detective said, "about how you paid him a thousand American dollars to take you and your wife out and then to bring only you back."

"Look now...this is crazy," Paul Cargo said, "Absolutely... Emma," he said, turning to his wife. "Emma—do you hear what he just said? Did you?"

Madeleine nodded. *"Oui,"* she said in a voice that could barely be heard.

"We're sorry to have to drag you into this, Mrs. Cargo," the detective said.

"But it is not so," Madeleine said. *"Je sais que ce n'est pas vrai."*

"Emma..." Paul got up from the sofa and started over towards his wife.

The detective stepped in between them and took hold of Paul's arm. "You'll have to come with us, Mr. Cargo," he said.

"Come with you? But what for?"

"We're booking you for murder," the detective said.

"Murder?" Paul Cargo had a half-bewildered, half-smiling expression on his face. "I must be dreaming. Emma—look, they're not joking. I don't know where on earth they ever cooked up a story like this. But tell them who you are, will you? And let's stop this nonsense."

"Who I am?"

"Tell them. . ."

"But...but I am Madeleine Cargo," she said. "I was born in Marseilles. You know that *cheri*. I do not understand..."

Paul Cargo was booked for first degree murder. He kept insisting, of course, that he couldn't have murdered his first wife since his first wife was really his second wife. She was an actress and she was playing a part and she was just going to let the trial go on so she could let the world see what a triumph she was as an actress.

When Paul Cargo's lawyers told him that perhaps they could make an insanity plea, he told them he'd fire them if they ever so much as mentioned such a thing to him again. He wasn't insane. The damned police were the insane ones.

The trial was, of course, in all the papers. It was front page news for several weeks. There wasn't a party you could go to on the North Shore where the Paul Cargo case was not the evening's chief topic of conversation.

On the day Madeleine Cargo was called to the stand, Paul Cargo seemed a bit more relaxed. He whispered to his lawyers, "She'll put an end to it today."

But Madeleine Cargo did not put an end to anything. She said she did not know what her husband meant when he kept saying that she was his first wife. She had never met his first wife. She had

seen her pictures. She was a very beautiful woman. But she had never known her. And she was sure that her husband would never murder anyone.

During her testimony, the judge, a bald tiny man with a bright red nose, asked her several times not to lapse into French. Madeleine apologized. "It is just that I am... so upset, you know?" she said.

When she was finishing her testimony, Paul Cargo suddenly bolted out of his seat. He rushed for the witness stand before anyone could stop him and he started pulling his wife's hair. She started screaming. Three policemen rushed to the stand to pull Paul away. "It's a wig!" Paul was shouting as he yanked at his wife's black hair. "Damn it, it's only a wig!"

But it was not a wig.

The policemen dragged Paul Cargo back to his seat. The judge cautioned him sternly that another such outburst and he would be forced to leave the court. Madeleine sat in one corner of the witness chair, crying softly, her face covered, her black hair mussed.

Paul Cargo was convicted of murder in the first degree. He was sentenced to the electric chair.

When his sentence was announced, he screamed out at his wife, "Tell them! Tell them! For God's sake..."

But Madeleine only began crying again, in a helpless, pitiful way.

An appeal was made. It was granted. There was another trial. There was more pictures in the papers. There were the same outbursts in court, the same testimony, the same verdict.

On the evening of December 17th, the night he was to die in the electric chair, Paul Cargo was visited by his wife Madeleine. She had received special permission to see him.

Paul Cargo sat limply on the cot in his cell. His round pink face had become thin and very pale He merely looked up when his wife entered. He did not speak.

Madeleine sat down on the cot beside him. Tears were rolling down her cheeks. She took hold of his hand, lifting it to her lips and she pressed a long, tender kiss into the palm.

"Cheri... my Paul... I cannot lose you," she said.

Paul did not speak.

"You are all my life, *mon cher,*" she said softly.

"Will you at least tell me why you've done this?" Paul asked her in a calm voice, turning to look at her now. "Will you tell me at least that? Emma... for God's sake..."

"J'n compren pas..." she started.

"Emma... you can stop now," Paul blurted angrily. "All that damn evidence from France... how... why did you do it, Emma?"

Madeleine stood up and broke

into a wild rush of tears, her body shaking with sobs. A guard came quickly to the cell door.

"You all right, miss?" he asked her.

Madeleine nodded

"Your time's about up now anyway," the guard said.

Madeleine turned to her husband. "I . . . must kiss you," she said. "I must kiss you . . . *parce que* . . . I must . . . " And she went running to her husband and she kissed him with a furious abandon, with a grief and a passion that could only amaze Paul Cargo as he stood there feeling his wife's mouth on his.

Paul Cargo died that night in the electric chair.

Madeleine Cargo went into deep mourning. The newspapers and magazines kept after her for some time. There were several who wanted to do feature stories on the case, others that wanted to do her personal story. One writer came to her and told her he would like to do a book about the case.

Seven months after the death of her husband, Madeleine Cargo boarded the *Liberte*, bound for Le Havre. She told friends and newspaper reporters she was returning to her native France to live. She could not bear to live in the house she had shared with her husband; it was so full of memories.

Everyone understood.

It was a bright summer morning as the Liberte pulled slowly out of the New York Harbor. Gulls flew about, making their white soft circles against the sky. The city stood tall, a flat gray color in the sunlight. All the passengers seemed to be crowded up on deck, watching the great skyline slowly disappear.

Several of the passengers, who were watching the skyline fade into the distance, were already talking about the fact that Madeleine Cargo was on board. They wondered whether they would see her. They exclaimed over how sensational the case had been.

"The poor girl," one woman said.

"But she does have over a million dollars," another woman said. "All that money of her husband's went to her, you know."

"Well, who else would it go to?" the first woman said. "She was his wife, wasn't she?"

But Madeleine Cargo wasn't thinking of the million dollars right now. The happenings of the past few months had been so very confusing.

If she could just keep herself busy, she thought, her day-to-day life might be better.

And so now, instead of standing up on deck with all the other passengers, she began to unpack her bags. She hung her dresses and her coats in the closet. She put some of her lingerie in one of the dresser drawers. She left out a blue nightgown she would use that night and her black dressing gown.

But then she found something very strange, packed down at the bottom of one of her bags. There was a large leather bound scrapbook of some sort.

Madeleine Cargo lifted the book out carefully. She could not imagine what it was. She had never kept any sort of scrapbook.

She sat down on the bed and opened the book and what she saw sent a shock through her, a kind of anguish she could not explain to herself. What she saw in the book were clippings about her husband's first wife. There were tiny newspaper clippings and pictures and several longer stories.

This must have been Emma Duvale's scrapbook. But how on earth had it ever gotten into her bag?

She spent sometime going through the book. She read all of the clippings, examined each of the photographs closely. Emma Duvale had been a very beautiful woman. She had to admit that. It was a shame she had been such a terrible actress—at least that was what the clippings said she had been. Madeleine Cargo sat there going through the book, actually feeling very sorry for her husband's first wife. It must be an awful thing to be a failure, she thought. How does one ever stand it? How does one escape from it?

But when she had finished going through the scrapbook, she forgot about the failure of Emma Duvale as an actress. She started to think of how she herself had always been utterly fascinated by the theatre. Even as a little girl in Marseilles, she remembered her father taking her to the tiny theatre on the Rue Huechet to see the punch and judy shows that were put on there.

Madeleine Cargo sat there on the bed in her cabin and thought how exciting it would be to be an actress. She smiled as she thought this. To make other people actually think you were someone else.

It was a silly idea, of course. She knew that. But perhaps one day she herself would become an actress. She would become the toast of all Paris.

She fell back on the bed and started to laugh at this absurd idea. But even as she laughed, something inside of her was telling her that if she really wanted to, she could become an actress, even a very great actress.

"But I will never keep a scrapbook," she said aloud. And when she heard these words, it sounded to her as if someone else in the room had spoken them.

I suggest you scrutinize the white space between the lines of this fable most assiduously. Some thought should also be given to a number, which is featured, that has no addition or multiplication tables and is related only to subtraction—Strontium 90 is its name.

Letter from a Very Worried Man

by Jay Street

ABBY had spent the past four days with her parents in Springfield. So as soon as she got back to Chicago, she anxiously examined the accumulated mail in her mailbox. She shuffled hurriedly through the envelopes, magazines, and leaflets until she saw the familiar scrawl of Richard's handwriting. She wanted this letter above all, because it was from her fiance, all the way from New York where he was attending a physicists' conference.

She waited until she was settled in a lounge chair, with a fresh cigarette between her lips. Then she tore open the envelope and extracted the folded sheet.

"Dear Abby,

"I love you. We're in the fourth day of the Conference now, and nobody's gotten drunk yet. What a convention! You'll be happy to hear that there are only four women physicists in the crowd, and they're all strictly from Lower Slobbovia, so you can stop worrying about my dubious virtue. Did I mention that I love you?

"There was a seminar yesterday on the Physicist's Responsibility in the Modern World, or some such jawbreaking title. The yawn might have come up like thunder in the audience, except that there were some pretty scary headlines on the hotel newsstand that morning, so everybody was a bit edgy. I got up and did some talking myself, but maybe I should have kept my mouth shut. You know how I am when I get started on Topic A.

"I know what you're thinking now: old guilt-ridden Richard's off the deep end again, blaming himself for helping to make the H-bomb. Well, I've been thinking about it, sure. How can you help it in this atmosphere? And when I look at the headlines, and remember that we're getting married in two weeks—how can you blame me for a slight case of jitters? We're walking down the aisle under the most menacing shadow that ever fell across this cockeyed world. We're going to have children (in due course, or didn't you know?) that will have to live, and maybe die, with the H-bomb in their backyard. You can't stop these thoughts, Abby, not even by trying.

"I thought about it all last night, and not sleeping much, if you want the truth. Wondering how a guy like me, a guy who helped put the thing together, who feels like a criminal, has a right to such happy prospects. Marrying you, settling down, raising kids, just like everybody else, just like Joe Normal. But then I think, well, I'm Joe Normal, too, and if the bomb hits, I go to pieces like everyone else; if the Strontium 90 starts filling up the water, and the milk, and the green vegetables, well, I'll get just as sick and dead as the next man. I'm not so special, honey. I don't feel guilty any more; just scared.

"But you know something? I learned something out here. Sitting around with the guys, meeting up with the science boys from England, and France, and Yugoslavia (yep, they're here, too) I began to realize something. I began to think that maybe the problems of getting along with each other aren't much worse than math problems. Even the big political problems, the ones which end up Bang! if the answers come out wrong, they can be licked, too. Sure, we'll be depending on a lot of people whose actions we can't predict or control—but we put our trust in strangers every day. The guy who drives the bus. The airline pilot. The

elevator operator. The short-order cook. One wrong step, and these guys could end our short, worried lives, too. So why not have faith? Why not trust a little bit? Maybe there won't be any big boom to put an end to our plans. Maybe there'll be sweetness and light for a change. Peace on Earth, good will to men, and all that jazz.

"I don't know what started me feeling this way. (No, I haven't touched a drop.) But all of a sudden, I'm hopeful. I feel good about you, and about us, and about our wedding day. I feel good about how we're going to live, and how the kids are going to grow up, and how we're going to sit in front of the fireplace for the next fifty years until we run out of things to say. The truth is, honey, all of a sudden I'm an optimist. I think we're going to lick our problems, all of them. I think the patient's really and truly going to live.

"Well, that's all the ink in this pen. I'm going to take a walk around this town now, and see how it looks for a honeymoon. I'll let you know if it measures up to our high standards.

"I love you, by the way.

"Yours,

"Richard."

Abby sighed happily at the conclusion of the letter, and ground out her cigarette in an ash tray. Then she looked at the next envelope in the pile of mail. It appeared to be official and had a local postmark, so she opened it curiously.

The contents were brief.

"Dear Miss Butler:

"We have been unable to reach you for the past few days, to inform you that the New York Police Department has contacted us regarding a man identified as Mr. Richard Cole. Mr. Cole was killed on the night of September 4 by a street gang of young hoodlums, and your name and address were discovered among his effects. We would appreciate it if you would contact Lieutenant Frank Kowlanski, Precinct 63, Chicago Police Department."

by Henry Slesar

Say It Isn't So, Ruby Martinson

The wise among you will recognize and readily understand our hero's greatness. Here is indeed the Compleat Crook. He does not even overlook that large, heretofore untapped segment: children. They, too, he nobly maintains, have the God-given right to be victims.

Some nights, when I was passing through the bewildering ages of eighteen and nineteen, I used to lie awake and wonder what my cousin, Ruby Martinson, *wouldn't* do. At twenty-three, Ruby had already committed crimes ranging from A to Z (Armed Robbery to Zoning Violations) and while Crime hadn't paid for Ruby yet, I knew that someday his fertile and nefarious mind would get him into either Sing Sing or the Yacht Club.

But if there was one crime I *never* could associate with Ruby it was Fixing a Baseball Game. Ruby was one of these real screaming, sobbing baseball fans you see every now and then, and every spring I could look forward to a change in his moods, depending on whether the Dodgers (then still Brooklyn's pride) won or lost. I went with him to Ebbets Field sometimes, and used to sit back and watch his big eyeglasses jiggling on his tiny nose, his thin body coiled like a spring, his freckles getting more abundant in the bleacher sun, and wonder if this was the same man who once worked out a foolproof scheme to hold R. H. Macy for ransom in the back of his own store.

Anyway, it all started with Dorothy, the girl Ruby was engaged to. Dorothy was one of these real sweet types, a schoolteacher, and completely unaware that she was planning to set up housekeeping with the World's Greatest Criminal. Ruby and Dorothy were pretty lovey-dovey around this time, and I didn't get to see much of him, but one day, after a Rubyless month, I got a message to assume my old post at Hector's Cafeteria on Broadway. It was good to see Ruby again, even if he looked as downcast as

the whitefish that lay sad-eyed in the delicacy counter near our table.

"Gee, what's wrong, Ruby?" I said. "Don't you feel well?"

"I feel lousy," he snarled

I didn't ask any questions, because I knew Ruby would tell me the story in his own sweet time. That's just what happened.

Like I said, Ruby and Dorothy were working for the old firm of Bill & Coo, and making plans for the future and stuff, and everything was fine. Even when Dorothy got the letter from her Aunt Katie in Duluth, announcing the imminent arrival of her youngest son, Harold, neither of them suspected that the Hand of Fate was about to make a clenched fist. As a matter of fact, Ruby was pretty interested to learn why Harold was coming east.

It seemed that Harold, at the age of eleven, was something of a pitching phenomenon, and he had been snatched up by the local scouts of the Little League. In case you didn't know, the Little League is a kind of runt-version of the Big Leagues, and the kids play each other with all the intensity you could find in Yankee Stadium. Harold had a won-and-lost record of 10-0 on the year, which is pretty good. I mean, it's not pretty good, it's *perfect*. The year before, he'd been the only 30-game winner in the league, and had carried his team, the Duluth Demons, to first place in the circuit. The eastern clubs were probably giving up already when they heard the Demons were on their schedule. Harold was quite a celebrity, all right, and Ruby was kind of tickled about it.

Until he met Harold.

Ruby's description of Harold wouldn't exactly please the kid's mother. He was a small, squat type, Ruby said, with a blobby nose and buckteeth and even more freckles than Ruby had. He kind of wheezed all the time, and he was always chewing on a matchstick, or eating, and his dirty shirttail was always out.

Anyway, Ruby was at Dorothy's apartment the day Harold came to visit; the kid was staying at an uptown Y with the rest of the team. The first thing he says to Ruby is:

"Boy, what a kisser! When does the mask come off, buster?"

I could just see the effect that had on Ruby.

"What's the matter, four-eyes," the kid went on, "cat got your tongue?"

"Now, Harold," Dorothy said primly. "That's no way to talk to your Cousin Ruby."

"My cousin?" Harold jeered. "Hey, you're not really thinking of marrying this creep, Dotty?"

Dorothy intervened before any serious trouble developed, and they declared a truce. They went out to dinner together, and the kid

stowed away three helpings of turkey, two glasses of chocolate milk, two slices of banana cream pie, and then dessert. When they went back uptown by subway, the kid whoopsed all over Ruby's best suit.

Needless to say, Ruby wasn't crazy about little Harold, and he told Dorothy so. Then he slammed out of the apartment.

Later that night, he called Dorothy in a fit of contrition, and she said: "It's all right, Ruby. As a matter of fact, Harold's sorry for the way he acted, and wants to apologize."

Ruby winced, and heard the kid say sweetly:

"Cousin Ruby? This is Harold. I'm sorry for throwing up on you."

"It's okay," Ruby said gamely.

"I didn't mean to call you ugly or anything. I mean, you can't help it, the way you look."

"It's all right," Ruby said, gritting his teeth.

"I'll see you tomorrow night then," Harold said.

"What?" But Harold was gone, and Dorothy was on the phone, explaining: "Ruby? I sort of promised you'd take Harold to Radio City tomorrow night. I'd go with you, but I have a late session at school. Sure you don't mind?"

"No," Ruby said, choking on the word. "I don't mind at all."

From the way Ruby told it, his night on the town with Harold was barely preferable to the Spanish Inquisition on one of the Inquisitions bad days. He was relieved when the movie and the ice show were over, and they went to a nearby Howard Johnson Restaurant for a nightcap. He watched Harold destroy two monstrous sundaes, and then tried to make conversation.

"Well," he said, "when's the big game, Harold?"

"Next Saturday," the kid said. "It's a sure thing I'll knock those guys off like flies."

Ruby forced a smile. "I guess you're pretty good. Not much chance of you losing, is there?"

"Nope. That's what the smart money says."

"Money? People don't bet on Little League games, do they?"

Harold dropped a wink. "Back home, we had some guys used to bet on every game. Boy, you're really a square, ain't you?"

Ruby wasn't insulted. He was too busy thinking.

"I guess you're right. People take all kinds of bets. But I guess the odds would be pretty ridiculous on that game—"

"I'd say a hundred to one."

"A hundred to one! A guy could really clean up, couldn't he?"

"Not a chance. I could lick 'em left-handed."

"But in case you *did* lose. I mean, you could always have a bad day, or get sick, something like that."

"Not me, buster. I got a perfect

record. I'm keeping it that way."

Ruby licked his lips, the hot criminal blood in his veins coming to a boil.

"But what if you *decided* to lose, Harold? What the heck. Nobody could blame you for losing *one* game. A couple of smart guys, they could make it real big, betting on the long odds. You see what I mean?"

"No."

"I'm talking about losing *deliberately*, Harold. I mean it would be like you *couldn't* beat those guys. I mean, *you'd* know, even if you lost. And then you and your partner could split the dough—maybe a thousand."

"A *thousand* dollars?" Harold said, bug-eyed. "Did you say a *thousand* dollars?"

"Think of all the banana splits that'd buy, Harold. I'll bet you never saw so much money in your life, did you?"

"No," Harold said, his brow wrinkling. "I never had more than five bucks at one time."

"And it's easy, Harold, no kidding. I'd do all the work, invest all the capital. All you'd have to do is put a few right down the middle, let 'em slam you around in the late innings. That's all it would take, Harold. What do you say?"

"Gee, I dunno—"

"Come on, Harold! It's just one lousy game. You can win every other game this year, and have plenty of good, old dough, too."

The kid looked up, a crafty grin spreading across his freckled face.

"Okay," he said. "What's one game? It's a deal, pardner!"

He stuck out his sticky hand, and Ruby shook it.

Well, the fix was in, and Ruby was pretty excited about it. Sure enough, he found some guys who were interested in betting on the game's outcome, and who seemed well-informed about Harold's prowess on the mound. The odds they gave him weren't exactly the hundred-to-one Harold had quoted, but they were still pretty good—twelve-to-one. Ruby went hopping around town like an itchy chicken, trying to raise as much money as he could, and finally managed to get together two hundred and seventy-five bucks, which he quickly placed in the hot hands of the bet-takers. He was happy about it, all right. Who wouldn't be, with a three-thousand dollar profit in the offing?

Dorothy was delighted in the change in Ruby, even if she didn't know the true reason. But Ruby started treating little Harold like he was some kind of visiting royalty, and the kid really lapped it up. On Wednesday, three nights before the big game was to be played in Reiss Park up in the Bronx, Ruby showed up at Dorothy's place with *two* boxes of candy, one specially earmarked for

Dorothy's ball playing kid cousin.

"Why, isn't that nice of you, Ruby," Dorothy said. "I'm so glad that you and Harold became friends."

"Yeah," the kid snickered, "Nothing like friendship, huh, four-eyes?"

"That's right," Ruby chuckled.

Harold plucked a cream center out of the box. "Sure is good candy, Cousin Ruby. Only I don't want to eat too much, of course. Gotta keep in condition."

"Sure," Ruby said, grinning.

"I really want to do my best on Saturday," Harold winked "If you know what I mean."

"Naturally."

"After all, I promised my Mom and Dad I would win, and I promised Dotty. I couldn't disappoint them, could I?"

Ruby began swallowing hard. "Harold," he said, in a gritty voice. "Could I speak to you alone a minute?"

"What for, Cousin Ruby?"

"Oh, don't worry about me," Dorothy said gaily. "I've still got dishes in the kitchen. You men have a nice chat."

She went off, and Ruby bounded off his chair and onto the sofa, where the kid was blithely chewing on a nougat.

"What kind of talk is that?" he said hoarsely. "Don't forget our arrangement, pal."

"Arrangement?" Harold's eyebrows shot up. "What arrangement's that, Cousin Ruby? Huh?"

"Are you kidding? About the game Saturday. You know."

"I don't understand you, Cousin Ruby," the kid said, smiling like a bucktoothed angel. "I'll try hard to win, of course. You can count on me."

"To win? Why, you little crud, I've got almost three hundred bucks bet on the other team. You better not doublecross me!"

"Why, Cousin Ruby! You know you shouldn't gamble on a Little League game. What would people say? What would cousin Dorothy say?"

Ruby grabbed his collar. "Are you coming across or not?" he said roughly. "Are you going to drop that game or not?"

"Heh-heh-heh," Harold said, through his closed throat. "The weed of crime bears bitter fruit. The Shadow knows!"

I think Ruby would have probably killed him at this point, except for the fact that Dorothy returned. But he knew for a certainty that the kid had no intention of dropping that ball game. He was going to pitch the Duluth Demons to victory, and Ruby could see his hard-earned money disappearing over the horizon of Reiss Park.

"What's the matter, Ruby?" Dorothy said. "You look so *pale.*"

"I think he's going to whoops," Harold said. "Move away from me, four-eyes, this is my best suit."

Well, that was the story Ruby related to me at Hector's, and I listened with all the sympathy I could muster. But frankly, I felt a tinge of relief, too, because this was one caper that Ruby hadn't gotten me involved in, and I was grateful. But I was grateful too soon.

"Anyway," he said, "the kid really got me on the hook. He's going out there tomorrow to win that ball game, just to spite me."

"Tomorrow?" I said. "You mean it's tomorrow he's playing?"

"Yeah. And that leaves me only a few hours to do something about it. But don't worry. I got the whole thing worked out; now all I need is a little cooperation."

I shrank about ten inches; I knew what was coming next.

"It's a beautiful and simple idea," Ruby said, leaning forward eagerly. "The only way to make sure that the Demons lose that game is to make sure that Harold doesn't play. Right?"

"Right," I said, uneasily.

"And how can I stop Harold from playing? By making sure he never gets to the game. Right?"

"Right," I gulped.

"And that's just what I'm going to do," Ruby said triumphantly. "I got the whole scheme worked out, and *you're* the most important part of it."

"Aw, Ruby," I said.

"Shut up and listen. Last night, when Harold was stuffing himself on chocolates, I took that lousy glove he always carries around and hid it behind Dorothy's sofa. I had Dorothy call him at the Y today, and tell him that he could pick it up tomorrow at her place, a couple of hours before the game. He'll come by for it, all right; he loves that stupid glove."

"So?"

"So this. He's gonna show up at Dorothy's place tomorow morning around eleven or so. Only Dorothy's going to be out with me."

"Out with you?"

"Yeah. I talked her into giving me an early date, going out around ten-thirty in the morning and taking the bus up to Reiss Park."

"Then how's he going to get his glove?"

"Someone else is going to be there, stupid. You."

"Me?"

"Yes, you, all alone in Dorothy's apartment. And what's more, you're not going to let him out."

"I'm not?" I said, swallowing half a cruller and almost choking to death.

"You bet your sweet life you're not. You're not going to let him out until the game's well under way at Reiss Park. You're gonna keep him prisoner until I make sure I win that bet!"

Well, if ever I raised a protest to one of Ruby's schemes, it was now. I mean, I really flipped all

over the cafeteria. The crime was practically kidnapping. And how could I ever hope to keep a little monster like Harold in Dorothy's cozy little east side apartment?

"Relax, relax," Ruby said harshly. "I got that part worked out, too. You engage him in conversation, see, about baseball and stuff. Both of you don't know how the time flies, get it? And what's more, you've turned back every clock in the joint one hour before his arrival. The kid doesn't wear a watch; he'll never know what's happening. You get it?"

"It'll never work," I blubbered. "Honestly, Ruby, I can't do such a thing—"

"All right, all right!" he said sharply. "I know what's bothering you. But don't worry—I plan to cut you in for ten percent of the dough I'm going to collect."

"But it's not the money, Ruby, honest—"

"That's enough," Ruby said curtly, standing up. "Cut out the lip and be at Dorothy's place at ten-thirty tomorrow. The rest is up to you. Understand me?"

Limply, I nodded. I didn't know what else to do.

The next morning started badly: I woke up. The more I thought about what Ruby wanted me to do, the more I hated the idea of getting out of bed and going uptown to Dorothy's apartment house. It was a miracle that I ever made it.

Dorothy and Ruby were all dressed up for an outing, looking like a couple of happy schoolkids. Dorothy kept worrying about having me wait for Harold, while they went out on their early date. But Ruby assured her that I didn't mind at all, did I? No, I said, I didn't mind.

"We'll see you at Reiss Park at one," Dorothy said. "All right?"

"Fine," I said, smiling feebly.

They went out and left me alone, and I started going around the place looking for timepieces. There was a big clock on the mantelpiece, a cuckoo clock in the hallway, and an electric clock in the kitchen; I turned them all back one hour. At the last minute, I remembered to turn back my own wristwatch.

I waited around, twiddling my thumbs, trying to read Dorothy's copy of the *Ladies' Home Journal*. I read all about the Problems of Middle-Aged Divorce, and then the doorbell rang.

I opened it, and discovered Ruby hadn't exaggerated too much. Harold had buckteeth that stuck out in front of him like a cowcatcher, and he had more freckles than my polka-dot tie.

"I come for the glove," he said, snapping half a pound of bubble gum in his jaws. "Who're you?"

"I'm a friend of Dorothy's," I said. "You want to come in?"

"Okay," he shrugged.

He made himself at home on the

sofa, while I started a phoney search for the glove.

I said: "I hear you're quite a baseball player."

"Fair," he said modestly.

"I'm interested in baseball."

"Bully for you, dad. Hey, you got a drink around this joint?"

"A drink?" I gulped.

"Maybe a lemonade?"

"Oh," I said. "I'll get you one."

I went into the kitchen and took almost twenty minutes making a pitcher of lemonade. It tasted like battery acid, but Harold swilled it down without any trouble. It must have made him hungry, because he asked me for some food. I found half a chicken, peanut butter, and apple jelly in Dorothy's ice-box; he had a sandwich of each, and then ate a slab of marble cake. I was sick just watching him.

I don't know how I ever managed to keep his attention for the next few minutes, but finally the spell broke and he said. "What time is it?"

"Eleven-thirty," I gulped, nodding towards the clock on the mantel.

"I better get going," he said. "I gotta be at Reiss Park at one."

"You got plenty of time!" I said wildly. "Have some more cake!"

"Nah, I better go. Thanks for the chow, buddy."

"You can't go!" I said.

"Who says so?"

I beat him to the door and spreadeagled myself against it. "You can't! I can't let you!"

"Are you nuts or something?"

"I'm sorry," I said, my voice trembling "I can't let you go. You gotta stay here."

"Stay here? You must be cracked!"

He tried to push past me; fortunately, he was only a little guy.

"Hey, you big slob, let me outa here!"

"I can't—"

He promptly kicked me in the shins.

"Yow! Cut that out!"

"You gonna let me out?"

"No!"

He launched his attack, and it was a beaut. I mean, I'm not a very physical type, and even a small-sized eleven-year-old can hurt me. He hurt me, all right. I was black and blue by the time he realized I meant business.

"Okay," he said, "if that's how you want it."

He turned and ran towards the window. Before I could prevent it, he had the window up and was yelling. "Help! *Help!* I'm a prisoner!"

"Cut it out!" I shouted, pulling him away.

"Help me!" he screamed. "Fire! Police!"

"Stop it!" I yelled, struggling with the nine arms he had suddenly grown. I don't want to have to tie you up—"

"Help Murder! POLICE!"

It was no use; I had to employ

drastic methods. I dragged him towards the sofa, and with a struggle that almost cost me a coat of skin, managed to bind his hands and feet and gag his mouth with the cords from the drapes on Dorothy's front windows. It was a nightmare; I felt like some kind of fiend. But the thought of Ruby's censure if I failed was even more frightening.

Finally, I had him quiet. I looked at the big clock on the mantel, and it was twelve-twenty. That meant it was really one-twenty, and the game was underway. I was plenty relieved, let me tell you.

About ten minutes later, the phone rang. I didn't know what to do, so I let it ring. Boy, did it ring. It almost drove me batty, so I decided to pick it up. I did, and heard Ruby's voice.

"*You lunkhead!*" he shouted.

"What?" I said.

"You dope! You *moron!*"

"Is this Ruby?" I said.

"Of course it's Ruby! How did you louse it up, you dope? How could you do it?"

"Do what?" I said.

"Harold's out there pitching, you moron! He just struck out the side in the first inning. The Demons are leading fourteen to nothing. How'd you let him get away?"

I looked at the bound kid on the couch, and my knees went to jelly.

"But I got him *here,*" I said. "It couldn't be Harold pitching!"

"It *is* Harold. How'd he get away from you?"

"But Ruby—"

"Three hundred bucks!" Ruby groaned. "Three hundred bucks!"

"Ruby, listen—"

He hung up.

I went back to the sofa, and loosed the gag around the kid's mouth.

"Who are you," I said.

"Me? I'm Flash."

"Who?"

"Flash Horowitz. Second-string shortstop for the Demons. And I ought to be at the game right now. Boy, you wait until I tell on you!"

"Flash Horowitz? Your name's not Harold?"

"Naah. Harold's my buddy. I just came by to pick up his glove for him."

The world disintegrated before my eyes; I swear I had a preview of atomic fission.

"Let me outa here!" Flash wailed. "HELP!"

"All right, all right," I said. "It was only a joke. I'll let you go."

I untied him, and for thanks, Flash kicked me smack in the left calf. Then he beat it out the door.

I sat down and waited for Ruby. I finished the box of chocolates, ate three slices of marble cake, and drank the sour lemonade, hoping, I guess, that I'd look so sick when the World's Greatest Criminal returned that he'd take pity on me.

As you know, I frequently offer the unusual in this fine publication. The only sameness that I tolerate—and understandably so—is fine entertainment, endlessly repeated. Now here is a story that is most assuredly out of this world.

death of a V. I. P.

by C. B. Gilford

No murder had caused quite the commotion—nor had quite the international complications—since the assassination of the Grand Duke at Sarajevo. True, big and important men had died, and possibly by violence. But always their deaths had been shrouded in mystery, with always just enough concealment of method, motive and manipulator, to prevent these deaths from becoming the kind of "incidents" which lead to catastrophe.

But the murder of Ramedo had just that kind of potential. First of all, it was obviously a murder. Ramedo did not die of natural causes. And then there was the matter of Ramedo's real identity, of who he at least claimed to be. The significance of Ramedo's death lay in just that—who was he? If he was an impostor, then there hadn't been a greal deal of harm. But if he really was what he steadfastly said he was...

He appeared one day out of the blue, figuratively, perhaps literally. He seemed like an executive or a banker or something like that, because he was rather distinguished looking, handsome, graying, with a neatly trimmed mustache, and very expensively tailored. In a pinstripe suit, oddly enough, a style which though still elegant, was also somewhat passe. As if the man had been out of touch...

He was observed for the first time deep in the mazes of the Pentagon, where he sought an audience with Brigadier General Allan Massard, Central Services Intelligence. He was a brave and persistent man, this pinstripe visitor, for he had to cope with concentric barricades of secretaries, junior officers, and even a colonel or two. But he surmounted all these obstacles eventually. They don't know quite how he managed it, but he must have been a smooth talker. General Massard was a busy

man, so busy that he usually just sent out for lunch.

And there he was that day, munching at a sandwich and at the same time trying to wade through the mountains of typed reports on his desk, when he found himself confronted with the interloper. The conversation as recorded here is merely approximate, as overheard through the intercom the General had carelessly left open.

"Who the devil are you . . . sir?" The General was a brusque blunt man. The addition of the "sir" at the end of his question must have meant that despite his anger at a stranger's being let in, he was yet somehow impressed by the man.

"My name is Ramedo," the visitor replied quietly.

"Don't recall the name," the General remarked acidly.

"That is because you have never heard it before."

"All right, all right, get to the point, will you?"

"I don't know whether you're the proper man to see," the visitor continued unperturbed. "I chose you somewhat at random."

"Well, I don't know whether I'm the man either unless you tell me your business." The General sounded somewhat heated by this time. Already this conversation had gone on longer than most of the busy General's conversations.

But the answer must have cooled him off considerably. "Perhaps," the visitor said, "you will be a bit more patient and listen to my whole story, if you understand this right from the beginning. I am an ambassador from Mars."

That was the form in which the rumor got out. Because that's all it was at first, a rumor, since there was no official announcement. And the rumor seems to have supplied no further details of the conversation between Ramedo and General Massard. Details, for instance, on the proof of Ramedo's claimed identity, or how he got from Mars to Earth, or what he wanted. Perhaps the General checked his desk intercom somewhere at this point.

But the rumor leaked through the Pentagon, at least as far as the ears of an alert journalist. And thus it got into the papers—a half-serious, half-joking report about a "man from Mars." It was in that form that the news first came to the group who called themselves the Council of Five. And they took it seriously enough to hold an emergency meeting about it.

They had all read the thing in the papers, when James Lee contacted his four associates by phone. They should meet right away, he told them. That evening. And in his Washington apartment. All four, Robert Pendrake, Thomas Masters, Sidney Foreman, and Maurice Esman, agreed. The paper had appeared on the streets at

three-thirty in the afternoon. They met at seven that same evening.

"How about a drink while we discuss this thing?" Lee suggested in greeting them.

"Never mind the drink," Esman said. "This is too important . . ."

James Lee was a huge, bluff, graying man. He put an arm around Esman's stooped shoulders soothingly. "Maurice," he said, "you're too excitable. Let's talk calmly. A few drinks will help maybe."

So Lee took time for the decanter and siphon bottle, and handed glasses all around. The four guests took chairs, and the host ensconced himself comfortably on the sofa.

"The first question," Pendrake began, "is whether this man Ramedo is genuine or not." Pendrake was small, slim, with an escetic face and sharp features.

"On that question we need more information," Lee answered. He glanced toward Sidney Foreman. "For that, Sidney, we'll have to depend on you."

Sidney Foreman was the most innocuous-looking of the whole group. He was of ordinary size except for his middle-aged paunchiness, balding, bespectacled. He had all the appearance of a respectable minor executive.

Now he nodded. "I'll consult my sources," he said.

"When?" Esman bleated. "We've got to know soon." Esman might have been said to look like a professor, with that scholarly stoop to his shoulders and his rather wild, ginger-colored hair.

"I've got to have twenty-four hours at least," Foreman protested.

"Ye gods," Esman said.

It was Lee who intervened. "Take it easy, Maurice," he said. His tone was rather commanding this time. "Sidney can't work miracles."

"But we can't do anything till we find out for sure . . ."

"Oh yes, we can," Lee said. "Why do you suppose I called you here? It's true that we can't take any action yet. But we can start to make plans."

Esman subsided, mollified a little, and gulped from his glass. There was a temporary silence.

Tom Masters broke it. He hadn't said a word up to this point. He'd relaxed his big, muscled bulk into the chair and rested it there. But he had the look of a lion in repose, lazy at the moment, but capable of enormous action at any time. He had close-cropped blond hair and a young face—young but not innocent.

"You sound like you might have some ideas already, Jim," he said.

Jim Lee toyed with his glass, took a moment for a thoughtful sip from it. "Not quite," he admitted finally. "Or very vague ones anyway. But there's this for sure. If this man Ramedo is really from Mars, some drastic action will be necessary."

"Do you think he really is?" Esman asked. "He could simply be a crackpot. Maybe just a madman ... like somebody who thinks he's Napoleon ..."

"Possibly." Lee was calm. "But he's a clever madman if he is one. How many madmen could manage to get the ear of General Massard in the Pentagon? I really think we should presume, at least till Sidney can give us a report, that this Ramedo is precisely what he claims to be."

"But that would mean ..." Pendrake began.

"That would mean that Martians are now capable of interplanetary travel," Lee finished. "And that's something that none of us had counted on, is it?"

There was a moment of sober silence. "Could mean also," Tom Masters said finally, "that if this one Martian puts in an appearance, and even though they haven't shown themselves, others could have accompanied him here."

Lee smiled. "Not only 'could have,' Tom, but probably did. We should take that into account too."

"Let's consider this," Pendrake interrupted. "What could the Martians want here?"

"Remains to be seen."

"Well, what plans can we possibly make then? We don't know if this Ramedo is genuine. If he is, we don't know whether he came alone. And finally, we don't know what he wants."

Jim Lee's eyes narrowed as he looked around at the other members of the Council of Five. "But we do know one thing," he reminded them softly. "We know our stake in this game."

The newspapers the next morning were full of the story of the "man from Mars." The offical silence hadn't been broken. But the reporters had discovered that some interesting things had been going on.

First of all, after that initial, "gossipy" leak from General Massard's office, not another single word, rumor or otherwise, emanated from there. Secondly, Ramedo himself seemed to have disappeared. Certainly he had not been observed leaving Massard's area, escorted either by men in white coats or by trench-coated Secret Service operatives. And to compound the mystery, Massard seemed to have dropped out of sight too. Other activity was evident, however. Notably the ingathering of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, hitherto scattered throughout the world on inspection tours. A watch, naturally, had also been kept on the White House, but if the President had communicated with Ramedo, nobody knew about it.

And it was not much more information than this that Sidney Foreman brought to the Council of Five that second evening. The

Council was both disappointed and alarmed.

Esman more than the others, of course. "We've got to do something," he insisted.

Lee was patient but not sympathetic. "Do you have any specific plan, Maurice?" he wanted to know.

Esman didn't. "You're the leader," he complained. "It's up to you to make plans."

Lee mixed drinks for them again, and this time they seemed more grateful than before. But instead of sitting and joining them, he took his own glass with him to the fireplace, and faced them all from there.

"What does it look like to all of you?" he asked them. "Does Ramedo's mission seem peaceful or warlike?"

"The big brass are flying in from all over," Pendrake pointed out.

"Merely a precaution possibly," Foreman argued. "Why should Ramedo have approached the military at all if his mission was warlike?"

"You've heard of the Trojan horse," Esman said gloomily. "Then there were those Japanese ambassadors just before Pearl Harbor."

"You think the Martians mean war then, Maurice?"

"How should I know? I've never met any of them. I know nothing of Martian psychology."

"This interplanetary travel capability though," Tom Masters said, "certainly proves a military capability also."

"More than a capability, Tom. A superiority."

"You mean Mars could win a war with Earth?"

"The Earth could do nothing but defend itself. It couldn't carry an offensive to Mars, now could it?"

"But there's that question of Martian psychology which Maurice mentioned. I'd wager odds that they don't want war, or they'd have sent weapons rather than an ambassador."

"Where does that leave us then?"

Lee finished his drink, set the empty glass on the mantelpiece. "I have a preliminary idea," he announced, "which I want all of you to think about. We can discuss it again tomorrow, and maybe by tomorrow we'll also have more information. But the idea is fairly simple. Assassinate Ramedo."

Esman stood up, his wild hair flaring. "Lee, are you crazy?" he began. But then his face changed, and a look of cunning came into his eyes. "I see," he said. "I think I see. It may be a very good idea."

When the full story finally broke, it broke with dramatic suddenness. How Ramedo's transportation was arranged so super-secretly was nothing short of miraculous. The newspaper accounts had

raised such suspicion and curiosity that all sorts of people were bound to be on the look-out. Yet Ramedo seems to have eluded all of them. So that his appearance at the United Nations meeting in New York was a complete surprise.

Of course the wires started humming within seconds of his having been identified there. In five minutes every capital in the world must have received the news.

The first big item in the story was that he was introduced by the American delegation in the U.N. "This is Mr. Ramedo, an ambassador from the planet Mars. He made himself known to us two days ago. The United States is now fully satisfied as to his identity and credentials."

That answered the skeptics, of course. Ramedo was the genuine article. A man—or men—had actually negotiated the vastness of space between two planets of the Solar System. The isolation of Earth was a thing of the past. International diplomacy would now have to be replaced by interplanetary diplomacy. That alone was the story of the century.

But what followed was even more startling perhaps. Ramedo acknowledged the introduction in smooth, flawless English, and then addressed the breathless, spellbound Assembly.

"I trust," he announced, "that the other peoples of Earth will accept without rancor or jealousy the fact that we of Mars have made this approach to you through the United States. This choice was the result of a study we had made of the political and international situation on this planet. Our first landing was made in a secret place more than a month ago. At that time we knew absolutely nothing of your habits and culture. We proceeded with caution, attempting to estimate factors of friendliness and hostility. Now we have decided to make our presence known."

Relays of reporters kept the world apprised of Ramedo's speech while it was still being uttered. Radio and television news services worked frantically to make quick tie-ins with the networks, so that as the speech proceeded most of the people of Earth listened to and watched the Martian firsthand.

"We have reached the conclusion," Ramedo continued, "that peace rather than war can and should be the result of this contact between our two planets. Mars hereby extends the hand of friendship to all peoples of the Earth. And it is our further hope that interplanetary friendship will also result in the settling of the many disputes which seem to divide you Earth people into separate nations, warring among yourselves."

It was a great day in the Assembly for the dreamers, the optimists, the utopians. More than one delegation reported sudden, almost in-

explicable feelings of warmth and brotherhood toward delegations with whom they'd been in open conflict only the day before. Perhaps some of it was due to Ramedo's personality, his obvious sincerity. Another part of it might well have been due to the awe they all felt upon seeing and hearing a being native to another planet.

"We extend the hand of friendship," Ramedo said, "and also the hand of assistance. We have noted the progress of your science as well as the status of your culture. We can say, without intending to boast, that we are somewhat more advanced than you in many of the sciences. Particularly, may I add, the peaceful rather than the destructive sciences. But we are willing to share our accumulation of knowledge with you. In one great stride, therefore, you people of Earth can step ahead a hundred years into the future."

The audience had been mute till that moment, in sheer fascination. Now somehow the applause started. It raced across the hall like a prairie fire, engulfing all in front of it. There were a few who had the presence of mind to observe this phenomenon with some detachment. And as far as these observers could tell, no delegation—no nation—abstained. The way they described it later—the millennium seemed to have arrived.

"Tomorrow," Jim Lee said to the other four, "there will be a ticker tape parade down Broadway."

"You think that will be the best opportunity?" Pendrake asked.

"At least the earliest."

"But won't there be the usual precautions taken? The place will swarm with Secret Service men."

Jim Lee nodded grimly. "I think they'll go through the usual motions of taking these precautions," he conceded. "But this affair may be different. This Ramedo has aroused the enthusiasm of the whole world. I doubt if there's ever been anything quite like this. People are in an absolute frenzy over this. Not just the public. But officials too. The confusion will be tremendous. And there's always opportunity in confusion."

"How shall we do it?" Tom Masters wanted to know. "Conventional weapons?"

"Oh yes, it will have to be conventional weapons."

Masters' seemingly young face was hard, thoughtful. "That leaves about three choices then," he said. "A pistol or revolver up close. A rifle with a telescopic sight from a window of some building. Or a bomb, either planted or thrown."

"All right, which one?" Pendrake snapped.

"Masters is a good enough rifle shot," Lee answered, "but this may be too tough even for Masters. The air filled with confetti. The unpredictability of the crowd as to its

getting in the way. I'd hate to chance it."

"And as for the pistol at close range," Esman said gloomily, "history is full of times when it has failed. It's the method of the madman, who feels too strongly and thinks too little."

"That leaves only a bomb," Pendrake said.

"Which would be my choice," Lee added. "But may I point out, before Maurice does, that here again there have been numerous failures. Most of them due, I would say, to the inadequate power of the bomb. A hand grenade or a couple of sticks of dynamite won't be nearly enough. We don't want this Ramedo merely wounded. That might serve some purpose, but we'd be much more sure if we killed him."

"What kind of a bomb then, Jim?" Masters asked.

"Why not a very small atomic bomb, the kind the Army calls 'tactical'?"

"Can we get hold of one easily?"

"That'll be Sidney's job."

They all looked toward Sidney. He was thoughtful for a moment, his eyes closed behind his spectacles. Then finally he nodded. "By tomorrow morning? Yes, I think I can deliver one by then."

"Then there remains only to decide which one of us will be responsible for getting the bomb sufficiently close to Mr. Ramedo," Lee said. "I could give an order, but I'd prefer not to. And I'd rather not call for volunteers either. I think I'd prefer the time-honored method of drawing lots."

They put slips of paper into a hat, four blank and one marked with an "X." Maurice Esman's pudgy fingers came up with the "X."

World news services simply could not keep abreast of the swift march of events following the astonishing explosion in the middle of New York on that sunny afternoon which had been so full of promise.

No one knew how many individuals perished in that explosion. A count—if anyone had been interested—would have been impossible, since so many bodies were completely disintegrated, annihilated. The important thing—and the disastrous thing—was that the man from Mars was undoubtedly atomized along with the many and uncounted Earth men.

In the first few hours confusion reigned supreme. A confusion which Maurice Esman, the student of history—had he been alive to remark it—would have said resembled the confusion following the assassination of Lincoln and the near-escape of Booth.

There was an immediate attempt to fix blame. The murderers must surely have been the Russians. But hadn't the Russians applauded Ramedo along with every other

nation? Anyway, the Russians denied the charge quickly, and with some good logic.

Immediatley, other nations ranged themselves on one or the other side of this dispute. Accusations changed by slow and grim degrees to ultimatums. Diplomatic arguments triggered off military alerts, and there was wild talk of war. Rumors spread that on some frontiers fighting had begun.

There was, in fact, some basis for these rumors. Because clues started coming in from radar networks. Hostile, or at least unknown, objects were indeed in the air.

Then somehow out of the welter of confusion a few wiser heads began to sense an even grimmer reality. Their fears filtered slowly through official levels and down to the man in the street. Those objects being detected by radar were not of Earth origin. They were Martian.

Now diplomatic and military machinery started working in new directions. At the United Nations, America and Russia joined in making an official apology to the Martians—the Martians who had presumably accompanied Ramedo. Of course they didn't know quite where to direct this apology, so they simply broadcast it, over and over again, filling the Earth's atmosphere with humility and contrition.

Then the world waited. But no answer came. Unless the answer was the continuing reports from the radar lookouts. A day went by that way, with the whole world holding its breath. Until the fears engendered by the ominous silence ushered in still a new phase of reaction.

The Russians, supposedly at least, made the first overtures. A mutual agreement, they urged, without any delay. All nations with rocket and atomic capabilities must join together. There was a distinct possibility of war with Mars.

The Council of Five, numbering now of course only four individuals, kept itself well informed of developments via their short-wave receiver. High on the Utah mountainside where they had rendezvoused, radio reception was excellent.

On the third day after the assassination of Ramedo, they made their final estimate of the situation. And they found themselves in substantial agreement.

"I think there will be war," Jim Lee said.

"These radar sightings are becoming more frequent and numerous," Pendrake remarked. "I suppose we agree on what they mean. At first there was just one ship. That was Ramedo's companions. They took off after the bomb blast, but they didn't go too far away. They kept returning for reconnaissance sorties, maintaining a

watch on various parts of the Earth's surface. But since that first day, they've been joined by several other ships, which had probably been hovering out somewhere at moon-distance. These Martians are a careful bunch."

"What about the apologies?" Masters wondered. "You don't think the Martians will accept them?"

Lee smiled. "Not very readily anyway," he said. "They've had their chance to reply at least, to say they were considering the matter. But they haven't replied."

"But will they make war?"

Lee's smile broadened. "Probably they haven't made up their minds. So they're still circling around. But it's a powder-keg situation. Sooner or later some trigger-happy military commander is going to shoot something or other up from Earth. Something to chase those radar blips. That'll do it."

"But there's still the big question," Sidney Foreman put in. "Who'll win this war?"

Lee shrugged. "The Martians have a scientific advantage. But not overwhelming. You heard Ramedo say they'd concentrated their research on peaceful projects. If you're asking, can they annihilate the Earth's population, can they blow the planet itself out of its orbit—I'd say a positive no."

"And there's no doubt," Masters added, "that the Martians will get a little mauled when the shooting starts. There's some pretty good rocket hardware sitting around here."

Jim Lee poured drinks from a flask he had. It was cold in this tent, and the whisky would have a warming effect. But he was celebrating also.

"Too bad Maurice isn't here," he said. "He might have told us who in history first invented the notion of 'Divide and conquer.' But, gentlemen, I think we can say we have applied this principle rather well. Let's drink to it, and then be off. Frankly I don't think we're expected to remain here and watch the final conclusion of all this, and besides, it might get a bit dangerous. So let's toast, gentlemen. Today, Earth and Mars. Tomorrow, who knows? For thousands and thousands of years, gentlemen, we shall be extending our conquests, by fair means and foul, farther and farther out into the reaches of space. To Venus, gentlemen, our planet, the planet of the Supermen!"

They drank and then they filed out of the tent and toward the space ship hidden among the trees. A few moments later there was a massive roar, and they were gone.

The Mother Goose Madman

by Betty Ren Wright

ONLY one thing distinguished the letter—that was the start of the terror—from the twenty she had already opened. The others were addressed to Juvenile Editor, Webster Publishing Company. This one said, Mrs. Julia Martell, Editor of Children's Books.

Julia noticed the distinction, but took no pleasure in it. She preferred anonymity in her job, which consisted chiefly of saying No to people. As a rule she barely glanced at the letters, but turned at once to the manuscripts which accompanied them. The letters were likely to tell too much, to paint too clearly the desperate beginner, the frustrated housewife, the poverty-stricken mother.

She slid a single sheet from the envelope. *Dear Miss Muffet,* the letter began, and she sighed, anticipating a cute approach. *Under separate cover please find my contribution to your line. It has been planned with you in mind and no one else. I hope it proves useful. If not, you will hear from me again. Sincerely, J. Smith.*

She glanced over the packages, looking for one addressed in the same hand as the letter. It was there, stamped *Fragile* and *Handle With Care* in a half-dozen places.

Fred Thompson stopped beside her, his arms full of art boards, and looked at the markings with amusement.

"Must be worth its weight in gold."

"Then it's not worth much," Julia said drily. "Feels empty."

She slipped off the wrappings. There was thinly spread excelsior inside the box, with a feathery scrap of black showing through. She moved the excelsior aside.

Her first reaction was disbelief. But there it was: the spider's black, hairy body drawn up over folded legs, the tremulous gathering of defenses as the excelsior was shifted. Then the legs moved.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Oh, *no!*"

She recoiled, because of her dread of all crawling things, while Fred slammed the heavy art boards down on the spider.

The brightly lit drug store marked the beginnings of home. She stopped there every evening on her way from the bus to pick up a paper, to buy a pint of ice cream, or to reorder the eyewash that made her hours of reading possible. Possibly she liked the store because

I now give you our moral for this month: every profession has its special, unique dangers. The second-story man may fall. The pickpocket's hand might become lodged in someone's pocket. And, of course, the editor of a magazine never knows when a rejection slip is loaded.

it reminded her of the one in which she had worked during her college days—the days before she had met, married, and been rejected by Ted Martell. Certainly her feeling about the place had nothing to do with the clerks and pharmacist who, big-city fashion, came and left with monotonous regularity.

Now she waved her prescription at the white-coated man in the back of the store, laid the slip on the counter, picked up a newspaper, and dropped a nickel beside the prescription.

"Anything else?" the man called to her.

"No," Julia said, but with some reluctance. The cheerful store was especially soothing after the unpleasantness of the afternoon.

Partly, of course, it was the fuss everyone had made that disturbed her. There was Fred, his eyes showing more concern than his comments, which consisted mostly of consigning all practical jokers to damnation. Then the copyreaders and secretaries who had conjectured about Miss Muffet and her spider until it was time to go home. Even Mr. Webster had come in, curious about the excitement in the usually subdued editorial offices.

She hated their attention, which threatened to break through barriers she had built around herself. It wasn't easy to maintain those barriers. She knew that according to psychologists it was not only difficult, but wrong. Yet for her it was the only way. Having given herself, really given herself to the last, foolish degree, and having had the gift returned without thanks, she could not take a chance again. She would therefore depend on no one. It was part of the bargain she had made with herself in the months after her husband had left her.

But it was more than the attention of her fellow-workers that had upset her. She considered that as she left the store and hurried down the block to her own apartment building. And it was more than the fact of the spider—actually, harmless. She was disturbed because in her determination to avoid every possible entanglement she had failed. There was, somewhere, a person who called himself J. Smith who, she intuitively felt, hated her with a very real hate. She, who had tried so hard to re-

main aloof from all feeling, was caught in the entanglements of another's deep emotion.

She lifted the door of her mail box and took out a handful of letters. Bills. Two invitations to spring book conferences. A letter from her aunt in Bangor, writing to thank her for a birthday present.

And an envelope addressed to Mrs. Julia Martell, Editor of Children's Books.

She put the other letters into her bag, opened the door of the automatic elevator, and stepped inside. She opened the envelope, almost eagerly. It was the same kind of paper, she saw that at once, the same thin hand. But she also saw that the salutation was different.

Dear Miss Humpty Dumpty, Did you enjoy my first submission? Expect another one soon.

The elevator lurched upward. Julia put out her hand to the emergency Stop button, but hesitated, did not touch it. The elevator slowed, halted. The doors opened and she faced her familiar hallway with its muted light, gray carpeting, lilacs on the table. She stepped out and waited for her heart to stop its violent thumping.

Humpty Dumpty had a great fall—

It wouldn't be in the elevator, or here in the hallway where one of the other tenants might be the victim. But it might be inside her apartment, or possibly—

She turned into the shadowed ell that led to her own door. If she had been stepping along at her usual brisk pace, it would have been a very bad fall, but caution had slowed her steps. As it was, she stopped at once when the wire barely brushed her left ankle. Then she sat down, hard and without dignity, because her knees suddenly failed her.

It was a thin, gray wire—the same shade as the carpeting—stapled to the paneling on either side of the corridor, about three inches above the floor. A foot away, it could not be seen.

After a moment Julia stood up, took a white linen handkerchief from her bag, and draped it over the wire as a warning to anyone else who might be coming in. Inside her apartment, she looked carefully in the bedroom, the kitchenette, the bath, the closets. Then she came back into the living room and called the police.

The next morning, she took the manuscript rejection files into the small conference room and closed the door behind her. If, as the police believed, her correspondent was a disgruntled and fanatic amateur writer, she would determine his identity herself. The handwriting was distinctive—unfinished loops on the ascending letters, a slanted cross on the "t," narrow "o's." She would recognize it.

There was only one letter in the

file from a J. Smith—a barely legible scrawl which apparently accompanied some childhood reminiscences and was signed, *Jack Smith, age eighty-nine*. The letter was two years old.

Patiently, Julia moved back through the file to its starting point. The lieutenant had warned her that J. Smith was probably a pseudonym, and common sense told her that the writer, even though he had taken no pains to disguise his handwriting, would hardly sign his own name to what would be evidence against him.

She was halfway through the third drawer, when the door opened and Fred came in.

"Any luck?"

She shook her head, then looked up, startled, into his grin.

"Everybody's g u e s s e d what you're doing in here," he said. "And at least six people volunteered to help your secretary sort your mail this morning... Didn't find a thing."

Julia bit her lip. "I wish they'd just forget it," she said. "The whole thing is silly. I wish *everyone* would forget it."

Her tone was sharper than she had intended, and his reply matched it. "What's eating you?" he asked, and it was as if the question had been there for a long time, waiting to be asked. "Just why—why don't you want people to care about you? Is that a crime in your book?"

They stared at each other.

"End of conversation," Fred said, after a long moment of silence. "Full stop. Now—how about dinner at Charlie's tonight—all the spaghetti you can eat and extra meatballs on request?"

"No, thanks."

"We can discuss politics; who's going to win the pennant this year."

"Thanks anyway."

Afterward, staring at the closed door with a feeling close to shame, she thought how pleasant it would have been to have said Yes. He was a nice fellow, fun to be with, gentle in a way her husband had never thought of being. If she were just the kind who could forget and start over... At once she was hurtled back to the months after Ted had asked for a divorce. This was the hell one invited by caring for someone—endless days punctuated with pain when sharp little slivers of the past forced their way into the present. Endless, unspeakable nights. She would never take a chance on going through such a period again.

It was late afternoon before she had completed checking the last file. Nowhere had she come across handwriting like the writing in the letters. The day had been wasted. And she should have been able to do the job, she scolded herself, much more quickly than she had. The trouble was that it had been impossible simply to glance at the

letters and put them aside. J. Smith was there somewhere; she found herself searching out the emotions of the writers, smiling at the timid jokes, responding to every question and request for advice.

Her secretary looked in to say she was leaving, but Julia remained at the conference table. As she had gone through the files, she had taken out every letter that held a reference to Mother Goose. These were stacked before her in a neat pile, ready to be checked again.

There were letters criticizing the rhythm of the old verses, and letters praising the Webster Company's two-volume edition. There were letters asking the meaning of a particular poem, or offering an explanation of another. One of them was written in an uphill hand on stationery headed Ravensfoot Sanitarium, Belden, Colorado, and was dated February eleventh. Julia found it quite moving.

Dear Editor: I am sending you my original Modern Mother Goose Rhymes for Modern Children. During my illness I have passed many hours making up these little poems which, I feel, would have appeal for today's child. I am allowed to sit up for a half hour every day, and during that time I have copied the poems by hand. I don't mention this to gain sympathy, but to show you how deeply in earnest I am about the value of the verses. Thank you for your consideration.

The letter was signed, *Dorothy Kesselman.* A note indicated that the standard printed rejection letter had been sent on February sixteenth.

Julia picked up the phone. "Will you get me the Ravensfoot Sanitarium in Belden, Colorado, please?" she asked the late-duty operator. "I want to speak to the doctor who is caring for Dorothy Kesselman."

She waited, fingering the letter, until the operator called her back. Then she listened without comment. When the operator had finished speaking, she thanked her and asked her to call Detective Schwarz at the police station.

"This is Julia Martell," she said when the lieutenant answered. "I think I have something for you to look into. A Dorothy Kesselman sent us some original nursery rhymes two months ago, and we returned them with our regular rejection letter. She was ill with advanced tuberculosis, and she died the day she received the letter. The hospital, in Colorado where she was a patient, says her husband Adolph moved to this city after his wife's death."

It was spring without question when Julia got off the bus that night and walked up the block. Children skipped like wraiths in the twilight. And in front of the old brick houses near the corner, jonquils poked yellow heads above their green. Julia looked at the

narrow windows of the houses and wondered about the people behind them. Were they happy? Were they lonely? Had any of them ever noticed her as she returned night after night?

At the drug store, one of the girls who worked part-time was behind the counter. Julia collected a paper, some magazines, and her medicine which was wrapped and waiting for her.

"How are you tonight?" she said, and was aware that the girl stared in surprise at the greeting. "It's spring," she added, foolishly.

Outside again, she felt as if she were ill and the greeting to the clerk had been a symptom, ominous as a first sneeze. The air crackled with the pain, the yearnings, the disappointments and the delights of all who breathed it. She shook her head, but could not shake away the awareness. Yet she knew she had to. The whole city was storming her barriers now, and she had to keep it out.

She walked faster, trying not to hear the children's shouts, the mutterings of old people on their front stoops, the soft laughter of couples passing by. When she reached her foyer, she tried to pass the mailbox without looking into it. But she could not ignore the envelope's whiteness, seen through the little slot in the box.

Dear Miss Peep-Peep, the letter said. *I don't know if you are much of a swimmer or a mountain climber, but it doesn't matter. The name fits—or soon will. This is my last submission, one which you have earned by your sympathy, your compassion, and your understanding. Sincerely, J. Smith.*

She read it again. Then, frowning, she crossed to the elevator and rode upstairs. She traversed the corridor with a slow, gliding step designed to reveal any invisible obstacles, and when she opened the door she stood back a moment before going inside.

It could be anything this time. She had never heard of Peep-Peep.

The living room appeared as she had left it. She looked around the rest of the apartment, then, with her coat still on, took her "History of Mother Goose" from the shelf and thumbed through the index. It was there—a short riddle-rhyme about a star:

I have a little sister, they call her
Peep-Peep;
She wades the waters deep, deep,
deep;
She climbs the mountains high,
high, high;
Poor little creature, she has but
one eye.

The telephone rang. Julia picked it up and heard the voice of Lieutenant Schwarz.

"You can relax, Mrs. Martell," he said. "We've got your joker. Picked him up right after you called us. The husband of the Mrs. Kesselman who wrote you—he admitted it right away. Went off

the deep end after his wife died. He says she worked for six months on the poems she sent you, and you didn't even— Well, he seems to think that if you'd sent a word of encouragement instead of a form letter, it would have made a difference. She was practically staying alive for your answer, according to him, and when it came —she just gave up."

Julia leaned back. "Yes," she said, "I understand you, Lieutenant. But it wasn't fair, was it? I mean, to put all that responsibility on me—"

The lieutenant sounded uncomfortable. "He says he wrote a letter that should have tipped you off," he said. "He knew he was going to be caught at this, but he didn't care... I'm sorry, Mrs. Martell. Anyway, you don't have to worry any more."

"Do I know him?"

"Could be." Lieutenant Schwarz seemed relieved to get off the delicate subject of motive. "At least, you've seen him. He's the pharmacist in the drug store just down the block from your place."

Julia returned the receiver to its hook and sat for a moment without moving. Then she picked up the bottle of eyewash from the coffee table and unwrapped it. Her handkerchief was lying on the table, and she poured a little of the solution on the cloth. The spot widened and then, as she watched, the dampened area shredded and dissolved. Through the small round hole, she saw the wood of the coffee table turn yellow.

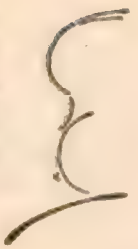
Poor little creature, she had but one eye. Julia looked around the room that had been for a long time her cheerful, safe retreat. Then she picked up the telephone directory and began turning the pages.

"Fred," she said a moment later. "This is Julia. Are the spaghetti and meatballs still available? I think I'd like them very much."

Every Sunday

Don't miss the most unusual and exciting suspense television show of the week—ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS. Every Sunday. Check your favorite TV program-guide for the time this top-rated mystery show reaches your area.

Fine resolutions, like fine china, are easily broken. However, the simile ends right there. For resolutions are inexpensive—even the most fragile ones—and they can be made quickly and by anyone. I hereby resolve to say no more on the subject. I would like to add that I regard myself an exception to the foregoing.



LAST DRINK

by O. H. Leslie

"POUR it slowly," Del Harmon said, putting his thumbs together and framing the picture of the barman and the bottle. "I want to remember you just this way." He giggled, and the elbows that had been supporting him on the countertop slid forward on the shiny wet surface. Rudy, the bartender, took it all with a grin, but Bob Pitter, the agency man who was Del's solemn-eyed companion, looked alarmed. He took a grip on Del's arm and said: "Hey, you've *had* it, buster. Throw that one down the sink."

"You don't understand," Del said, enunciating each syllable. "This isn't *any* old drink, Bobby boy; this is the last drink in a long, long line. Am I right, Rudy?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Harmon," the bartender said, winking at Pitter. "A long line is right. But the last?"

"The last," Del said sonorously. "The absotively last, old friend." He placed the edge of the small glass to his lip, threw back his head, and the amber contents vanished down his throat. He shut his eyes, as if savoring its journey to the interior, and then seemed more sober than he had all night. "Last drink," he repeated. "You ought to be glad to hear that, Bob. Maybe I'll get those films of yours out on time; maybe you won't cancel me out of so many jobs."

"Who, me? You're the guy who backed out, Del, I could have you grinding out spot commercials by the barrel, if you'd take the work."

"Things'll be different," Del said gravely, tightening the knot in his striped tie. "You'll see. I'm going to be a different man. No more jags, no more women, the whole virtue bit. Sober, hard-working, industrious; you name it, I'm your boy scout." He grinned youthfully, bringing sudden attractiveness to his long, flat-cheeked face.

"Now I'm going home," he announced. "Home to Alma."

"Alma?" Bob Pitter did a double-take. "Did you say Alma? I thought it was off between you and her."

"*Was* off," Del corrected. "Now on. Man and wife again, old pal, hearts and flowers and all that." His voice changed, the flippancy vanishing. "I had a long talk with her this week end, a real good talk, Bob. She made me see what a rat I've been; not that I needed any colored slides. But I made a promise, and I'm keeping it. And I start with this." He jerked his thumb towards the bottles glistening behind the bar, and then reached for his wallet.

"Here, let me," Bob said.

"Uh-uh, this gotta be official. I gotta pay for it, don't you see?" He did, and for all the other drinks that had preceded the final one; then he dropped a five-dollar bill onto the pile. "This is for you, Rudy," he said. "To make up to you for losing a customer."

"Sure," Rudy said, nodding. "Thanks a lot, Mr. Harmon."

On the street, Del stumbled and almost fell. Pitter caught him in time, and said: "Last drink or not, pal, you're stoned. Sure you want to see Alma, looking the awful way you do?"

"I'll be okay," Del chuckled. "By the time I get home, I'll be sober as a judge. That train ride does it every time."

"Want me to walk you to Grand Central?"

"Nah, you go on home, Bob. Lucky city slicker. Lucky bachelor. Bet you got a blonde waiting on your doorstep right now,"

Pitter laughed. "No such luck. But maybe if you're turning over a new leaf, Del, you'll give me your discards—"

"You're welcome to 'em, buddy, every one of them. All I want is Alma, my sweet Alma . . ."

"Man, you're really reformed."

"I'm in love," Del said, looking at him seriously. "I love my wife, Bob. So help me God, I love her." There were tears in his eyes, and Bob Pitter saw them and looked away in embarrassment. Then he clapped his friend on the back and headed uptown.

Del was wrong. The train ride didn't sober him; it only rocked him into a muttering, unrefreshing sleep. When the conductor, who knew him, shook him awake just before they screeched into North White Plains, he responded blearily. The high step of the train seemed twice as high as usual; it was only drunkard's providence that kept him from breaking a leg or twisting an ankle.

As he walked to the parking lot, the cool night air helped a little. But when he finally located his car, the low-slung two seater he affectionately called T-bird, he was unable to put key and lock to-

gether. He cursed his unsteady hand, cursed Henry Ford, cursed the six-mile trip he faced to his house. His house, and Alma. The thought of his wife steadied him.

"Alma," he said aloud, starting the car and turning out to the highway. He said it reverently. He *felt* reverent. After two years of marriage, he had suddenly found its real purpose and joy. When the trouble began between them, he had blamed the hectic business he was in, the production of television commercials: the constant pressures, the squeezeplay between ad agencies and clients, with himself in the middle. It was the business that made drinking a necessity, late hours inevitable, other women a natural consequence. Now he knew the fault was his own; that he had been struggling against the whole idea of marriage. But he wasn't struggling anymore. He needed Alma. He loved Alma.

"I love you, Alma," he said to the night, his eyes dimming with sentimental tears.

They were still dim when he took the turn-off that brought him to the unpopulated dirt road that would shorten his trip by half a mile. He wanted the trip shorter; he had told Alma he would be home at eight.

His eyes were still dim, when the green and white flash appeared out of nowhere on the road. For a fraction of a second, the lights of the T-bird gave definition to the phantom, outlined the swirl of white dress and green cardigan the woman was wearing as she stood beside the stranded automobile. It was only later that he realized how close to the edge of the road he had been traveling, that the jolt he felt and the soft thumping sound he heard were the effects of collision. That was later. When it happened, he roared away from the scene like a racing driver, fleeing from something too terrible to face or think about.

After a while, his head cleared and he began to slow down. He stopped the car completely, and lit a cigarette. He thought about what had happened, and knew that some action was required.

"What do I do?" he whispered. "What the hell should I do?"

Then the thought came that the woman might still be alive, and in need of help.

"Maybe she's only winded," he said. "Happens all the time. Just knocked down and winded. I wasn't really traveling fast."

He threw the cigarette out of the window.

"I've *got* to go back," he said, resisting the part of his mind that said "why?"

He put the car into reverse, and backed onto the soft shoulder of the road. Then he turned the T-bird around and headed south once more.

He saw the car first. It was a dark green Plymouth, not new,

and all the lights were off. There was no sign of the woman, and he allowed himself the hope that she had simply gotten up, brushed herself off, and walked away in search of aid.

He parked the T-bird on the other side of the road, and climbed out.

He found the woman almost thirty yards from her auto. She had been thrown into the soft foliage that lined the road; when he saw her unmarked face and neck, he thought she might be still alive. Then he saw her bloodied arms and dress, and saw the broken posture of her body, and knew she was dead. He lifted her up (she was light and frail, so much like the weight of Alma) and bore her back to the parked cars.

In his headlights, he could make out her face. She was a woman in her early thirties, and pretty, a woman who might have looked cool and poised and interesting, if sudden death hadn't erased all expression from her features.

For the first time, he looked at the front of his automobile and saw the unmistakeable marks of collision. The sight of the tortured metal was somehow more gruesome than even the dead woman in his arms.

Panic took hold of him, and he didn't try to fight it off. He trembled so violently that he could no longer support her slight burden; he placed her on the ground and dropped to his knees, covering his face in his hands and moaning. But the moans weren't for her; she was a stranger. The moans were for himself, for his own bad luck, for Alma. Unfair! It was so unfair! For this to happen *now,* at the first turn of the new leaf...

He stood up and looked down at the body, his mouth twisting with an emotion that could only be called indignation.

"You fool," he murmured. "You stupid fool..."

He looked at the woman's abandoned auto, and had the wild idea to place her in the driver's seat, put her back where she belonged, drive off and forget about it. She had no right getting out on the road at night, without lights, without warning... It was stupidity, her own rotten stupidity.

He walked to the Plymouth and opened the door. The key was still in the ignition; he tried it, and nothing happened. Battery, trouble, he thought.

He couldn't return her to her car, or leave her here. It wouldn't solve anything. They'd find her, and know how she died. They would investigate, learn who traveled that route each night, discover he was on the train. They would find the damage to his T-bird, question him, and he could never hide his guilt, not successfully.

Time! Del Harmon thought. He

needed time; that was the only answer. If the woman *weren't* found right away, there would be time to cover his tracks, time to obliterate any connection between his trip home and her death . . .

He stooped down, and lifted the woman's body once more. Unaccountably, she felt heavier this time. He brought her to the T-bird, and opened the right-hand door. With a struggle, he managed to squeeze her into the front seat. She didn't slump; the form-fitting seat held her rigid; she might have been nothing more than a sleepy passenger. Then he got around to the other side, and returned to the driver's seat.

He didn't know where he was going; he only knew that the direction must lead away from the abandoned Plymouth. Miles away, to a back road as deserted and wooded as the one where the tragedy had occurred. Someplace where he could lose his passenger, someplace untraveled, where a body could moulder for years before discovery . . .

The dirt road ended, and he turned into the main thoroughfare. It was only a mile to the development where he lived, only a mile to Alma, but he couldn't go there. The thought was agonizing: sanctuary so close, and so unapproachable. He sped through the outlying avenues, cursed at the red light that halted his progress, gunned the engine when it turned green. As he passed the brightly-lit homes along the way, they seemed so smug and comfortable and full of domestic cheer that he was filled with envy, and felt an irrational hatred of the stranger by his side.

He didn't know how far he drove; he didn't check the mileage counter. He recognized Pulham's bridge, fifteen miles north of his house, and then he drove on for still another half hour. He kept on driving, searching out back roads, until he found a sign on a strange highway that warned travelers away from an unfinished road that lead nowhere. Nowhere was where he wanted to go; he took the road until its lonely end, stopped the car, and turned off his lights.

Then he lifted the woman's body out, and carried it deep into the woods.

He left it there, covered with leaves and branches and handfuls of dirt, like something shameful and repugnant. Then he returned to the T-bird, switched on the motor, and went slowly back to the main highway.

It was almost midnight when he found his way to the familiar site of the development; almost three hours had passed since he had first seen the flash of green and white in his headlights.

When he sighted the gently-sloping roof of his house, the undulating log fence with its garland of rambler roses, emotion filled his

throat and eyes. The windows were dark; Alma hadn't waited up for him, but that was all right. He would go into the bedroom and wake her himself, with a kiss on her smooth cheek. He would sit on the bed and hold her hand, and talk quietly about things that were important to them, about his new resolutions, his promises for the future...

He turned the car into the driveway. The garage door was down, so he stopped the T-bird, put it in neutral, and clambered out. He put his fingers around the door handle, and swung upwards, but it didn't budge. The garage door was locked.

He swore angrily at Alma, forgetting his tender thoughts of only seconds before. It was stupid of her, typical. He looked back at the auto in the driveway, at the damning evidence of impact on the fenders and hood, and cursed his wife's thoughtlessness. He turned the motor off, and went to the front door. Then he remembered that he didn't have a key, that he hadn't owned one since their seperation six months ago. There wouldn't be any tipping into bedrooms and gentle kissing of cheek. He would have to ring the doorbell, in order to bring her downstairs.

He rang the bell.

When she didn't answer, and when no light appeared in the upstairs window, he rang it again. When there was still no answer, he punched it savagely, and then knocked.

"Alma!" he whispered hoarsely. "It's me, Del."

Finally, a patch of light fell on the lawn. He backed away from the doorstep, and saw the faint yellow glow behind the venetians of the bedroom. He rang the doorbell again, and waited.

Then, unbelievingly:

"Del? Go away..."

It was only the faintest of whispers behind the door. At first, he doubted that he had heard it at all, but when he rang again, she said:

"Go away, Del! Do you understand me? Go away!"

"Alma! Alma, it's me!"

"I *know* it's you. I won't let you in, Del. It's no use making a fuss."

"But you've *got* to let me in! Alma, for God's sake—"

"*Go away!*" he heard her scream. Then silence.

He rang the doorbell again, in short staccato bursts. He pounded on the door until it shook in its hinges, but there were no more words from the other side. On the lawn, the distorted rectangle of light suddenly disappeared.

"*Alma!*" he shouted. "Alma, let me in!"

He was there for twenty minutes, pounding uselessly on the door, not caring when lights began flickering on in the adjacent houses, when angry voices filtered

through the night telling him to shut up, to go away, threatening him with violence and police action. In desperation, he tried the back door and found it barred against him, tried to wrench open the kitchen window, without success.

When he came around the front of the house once more, there was a gray and white automobile driving slowly and ominously towards him, and there were uniformed men in the front seat.

There wasn't time to explain, time to tell them all he wanted them to understand. They were too curious, too suspicious; the T-bird in the driveway became the subject of their probing flashlights before he could find the words that would send them on their way. "Hey, Petey, have a look at this," one of the troopers said, his light flickering over the crumpled front end of the two-seater. "This your car, mister?"

He couldn't answer calmly; they looked at his whitened face and trembling mouth and sensed that he was more than an indignant husband. They examined the seat of the T-bird, and under the flashlight inspection, the bloodstains were shockingly crimson against the beige upholstery. They looked at the front end again, and then at Del, and he stammered:

"It wasn't my fault. So help me, it wasn't. It was an accident..."

Ten minutes later, he was slumped into the back seat of the police vehicle, resigned to anything, guiding them to the deserted wood where he had tried to hide his shame and guilt.

There was only one consolation. When the news of his arrest reached her, Alma came to see him. Del nearly wept at the sight of her, and cursed the wire barrier that kept them apart. He put his fingers through the mesh, touched her hand, and said:

"Why'd you do it, Alma? Why'd you lock me out? I know I was late, hours late. But that wasn't enough reason..."

"It wasn't that, Del."

"Then what was it? What made you do it?"

She looked away from him. "It was Margie Wright. She was the one, Del. It was her fault."

"Wright? You mean that old biddy from the bridge club?"

She nodded. "She—she called me around nine-thirty. She said she had something to tell me, that it was in my best interest; something I ought to know."

"Know? Know what?"

"Margie was out on the lawn, putting away garden hose or something, when she saw your car go by. She recognized it, and she recognized you. And she told me—" Alma covered her eyes. "That you had a woman in the car. A strange woman, and pretty."

THE five guards in uniform and the executioner in a neat gray business suit, who were escorting the condemned man, seemed conscious of their roles in the human drama that for all its well-known ending had never needed a rope to hold its audience. John Corleen —looking, in spite of his dazed pallor, incongruously casual in his white T-shirt, gray slacks and brown leather slippers—realized that he had already crossed the last door only when he saw the two score witnesses seated in silent rows. A moment later his darting eyes discovered IT—the topic of endless cynical conversations from cell to cell, the object of cracks received with sour laughter, the bogy of all his waking and sleeping hours for the last fourteen months.

Just as he had not expected the

THE MURDER WAS PERFECT

by Hans Ruesch

sterile death chamber to have soothing green walls (*For the sake of the spectators—or of the victim?* he asked himself with bitter irony), so he had not known, although by now he knew many things, that The Chair was oaken and, minus the sinister straps dangling from its sides, would not have looked out of place in William Walker's own posh office. He had anticipated a somewhat Frankensteinish, angular and metallic contraption.

His discovery made John Corleen take a wavering step or two, which caused his escorts to close in on him and rush him to his seat. Working like men who are late for a train, they strapped him solidly, bared his right leg for the electrode, and slipped the black leather hood over his head.

This last surprise increased John's indignation—and dismay.

What makes a perfect murder difficult to come by, is that murder itself is rooted and blossoms out of imperfections. This horticultural note is by courtesy of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, without whose untiring help this message would have been well nigh impossible.

For the gnawing thoughts he had, on the whole, successfully held off that day would now sink their fangs into him once more, inescapably. He had resolved to concentrate, with a sort of detached, "scientific" interest, upon the mechanics of preparation, as a means of excluding the fear of the execution, which had harassed him with increasing insistence ever since he had known his fate, leaving his mind in a feverish, tattered state that was close to insanity. Now all those thoughts assailed him once more... like that pack of hounds, it occurred to him, in the old print of a bear hunt which hung over the desk of his father-in-law. His *late* father-in-law, he corrected himself with a mental sneer—the devil take *him*.

John Corleen was going to burn for another man's mistake, and the dwindling span of time which separated him from the two thousand raging hounds, he meant volts, that were about to flash into his terror-chilled flesh would now be filled with nothing but agonizing expectation. Without the hood he could try to distract himself by glaring his defiance at the guards, whom he had heard withdrawing against the wall. Or by attempting to locate the alcove where, seeing but invisible, lurked the "electrician," or the "exec,"—as the executioner had been dubbed by the wags in Death Row, though John Corleen failed to see any humor in those monickers now. Or he could have conveyed his contempt of the audience (*small but chosen audience,* he thought sarcastically), convened to squeeze the last drop of sadistic pleasure out of this murder. For that's what his execution was: A Murder of Justice!

His every fiber screamed for survival. He had only just started to drink from the cup of life. He was twenty-eight, healthy, dashing—and engaged to a wealthy woman. Not to mention the sizable windfall that had dropped into his lap when least expected, and which he had scarcely had time to touch.

The bald circle in the middle of his black hair, shaved clean by the prison barber for the other electrode, started to itch. He tried to focus his thoughts upon it, but presently the itching stopped, and once more John Corleen fell prey to all the hounding terrors. If it was painless, why did the condemned men jerk and strain so that the straps creaked each time the current was applied? And if death was instantaneous, why was it necessary to apply the full power several times? And why were the corpses of the electrocuted red? And their clothes drenched in sweat?

But perhaps the worst thing was his sense of the utter inevitability of it all. He had known, from the moment the case had broken, that

proof of his innocence would not, could not be forthcoming. And yet he had hoped to the last. And was still hoping. And would die hoping. He had gone over the case a million times, seeking a loophole through which he might squeeze to safety. He was still seeking one now.

Life had suddenly appeared like a bowl of cherries (John Corleen had learned from Christabel all the stereotyped phrases) after the first trial, which had been a harrowing experience: his accuser's sobbing, sickening antics, which had made nationwide headlines. William Walker, his father-in-law, once considered one of the most brilliant architects in the country, now just a distraught, broken old man, had ranted, sputtered wild accusations at John, without however producing a shred of evidence. And the jury had returned a verdict of "Not guilty." There was nothing else they could possibly do.

Christabel had died because her dressing gown had brushed against a candle and burst into flames. The fire had been accidental; nobody denied that. It was Christabel who had bought that dressing gown a few days before, in one of her bargain hunts. It was Christabel who always insisted on using candles when they dined together in their little duplex apartment—it was her father's belated wedding gift—on East 72nd Street, and it was she who kept the candles burning even after dinner, while listening to Symphony Hall. That was her idea of "gracious living," or simply a pathetic attempt to make the home nest more attractive to her migratory husband. John was upstairs in his bedroom when it happened, watching his own TV set, as he usually did when Christabel dialed some long-hair program and he didn't go out.

Mr. Walker's version of the accident tallied to a T with John's—up to this point. According to Walker, Christabel had told him that when John, rushing to her screams, had seen the living torch rolling on the floor, he had not moved a finger to save her, but had looked on until the "bargain" gown was burned up—and Christabel's skin with it.

It had taken her a week to die. During the last three days and nights she had been kept continuously in a bath filled with some solution to ease her agony. She was quite out of her mind by then, from the pain and whatever happens in the human brain under such stress. (She *sang* in the tub—gay marching songs, even some rather *risque* ones, which she had heard God only knew where, for normally she wouldn't have been able to *think* of a ribald line if her life depended on it.) Revolting, the teary, maudlin way old man Walker had told the court about it. Or rather *tried* to tell,

for Kermit ("Seaspray") Harrison —the old lion of the courtroom, John's defense attorney—had promptly objected that the agony of the deceased was irrelevant to the case, and the judge had sustained the objection.

Harrison had objected even more sharply when the name of Mrs. Mae Zimmermann was dragged in; but this objection was overruled, and Walker was allowed to tell what he knew about John and the wealthy widow.

Skillfully steered by Harrison, John had not denied his trysts with Mrs. Zimmermann, or that he had asked his father-in-law for money and his wife for a divorce. He denied only one thing: that he had deliberately let Christabel burn to death. Experts testified that there were among the many new synthetic fabrics some that flared like a gas tank.

It was in the hospital, while waiting to be wheeled into the ward, that Christabel had confided to her father her version of the accident. Later on, after having been treated and put under sedatives, she had been unwilling, or unable, to repeat her charges in front of others, as her father urged her to do.

William Walker had been a widower for many years, and Christabel, his only child, was his reason for living, for going on working, for becoming successful and rich. He had protected her as the eyelid protects the eye, keeping her isolated, and practically insulated, in the loneliness of wealth, preventing her having a normal childhood and adolescence: no dates and parties and boy friends—only French governesses and private tutors and chauffered limousines instead. And, when she was grown, he had started complaining of depression, lonesomeness, old age, and so Christabel had stayed on with him, kept him company, run his household, while he scared away every suitor who came near her.

Winning Christabel had been no easy enterprise. A first meeting of darkly handsome, smartly dressed John with her father had proven particularly unsuccessful, establishing in a painful cross-examination that the young man's means of support were invisible, his past as nebulous as his projects for the future, and his only claim to distinction a four under par on the golf course where he had made Christabel's acquaintance. (In fact, according to Mr. Walker, playing golf seemed to be the hardest labor John was willing to do in order to get ahead.) Thenceforth they had to meet on the sly, stealing kisses like illicit lovers, and John had to resort to all his persuasive powers: "Drop that selfish old man—you've got your own life to live—you want a husband, children, a home of your own, Christie-Love,

don't you? He has no right to shackle you like this, most aging fathers try to do just that—it's an old story. Let's elope. He'll get used to the idea, fall in love with his granddaughter for a change!" Christabel cried on her lover's shoulders, cried in his arms, but remained immovable as a wall, unreasonable as a four-year old. Until she was with child ("Those things just happen, Your Honor, you know how it is.") and thus at last they were before a clergyman. And her stunned father had no choice but to acknowledge the accomplished fact, without a squawk.

But if Christabel could make a fine show of stubbornness, so could her old man. And although he forgave his daughter, even bought her that apartment, he didn't forgive his son-in-law. That is, he put him, as it were, on probation. Before accepting him, he wanted to see how he behaved himself and how he'd provide for his family. John was determined to make good. For a start, he allowed his wife to sell some of her jewels so that he could buy a second-hand car business. He knew all about cars. But it didn't work out. He had started with too little cash and too many liabilities. And so Christabel lost her money and, around the same time, she also lost her unborn baby. Then John tried to sell real estate on commission. Plenty of money in that, if one's lucky to make just a few sales a year—which John wasn't.

That's when he began asking Christabel to go to work on the old man, persuade him to stake them in an enterprise he had long been planning. John's ideas were —big: revamp an old mansion he knew in Miami, turn a motel in Las Vegas into a gambling establishment—that's where the money was! No piker he: one hundred and fifty grand was the sum he had in mind, though he might have settled for less.

Now Christabel was not the handsomest woman in town, perhaps not the cleverest either, but one thing she had—a pride as big as a house. And she would rather starve than eat crow, admitting that her dreamboat was a wreck. She wanted John to work himself up on his own, so that she might prove her father wrong.

Poor Christabel! Poor naive little Christabel, a rich man's sheltered daughter who didn't know the score, who thought all men were, like her father, able—and willing—to start from the lowest rung. Well, she may have lacked practical experience, but when it came to nagging she took the cake! "Get up, sweetheart, and go look for an occupation—any honest job will do for a start—one thing leads to another—it's the early bird that gets the worm..." She was also a walking cabinet of Benjamin Franklin's collected bromides.

and then some. Dear Christabel!

Matters came to a boil the day John went to Walker's office with an elaborate scheme of how he could double in a year the hundred and fifty grand he wanted from him. As Walker didn't consider the proposition sound enough to back, John had become demanding, threatening, and finally declared flatly that if he was to stay married to Christabel Mr. Walker had better give.

So now the cards were on the table—and John was out the door, bodily ejected by his raging father-in-law, who was henceforth determined to make his daughter shed her fine husband. But when he had all the evidence on John—week ends in New Hampshire, "business trips" to Miami with Mrs. Zimmermann—Christabel, being Christabel, *refused* to see it, to believe it, and broke with her father, not with John. She hung to John like a drowning person to a lifeboat—not asking whether the lifeboat had a hole.

John went on with his pursuit of happiness, which he sought mainly elsewhere. Mae Zimmermann had not quite the money old man Walker had, but John had the impression that hers was easier to get at. He had assured her he was working toward a divorce (although Christabel, who was religious, had categorically ruled it out), and meanwhile he was trying to persuade Mae to invest some of her money—say a hundred and fifty grand—in a surefire deal. She seemed just about ready when Christabel's accident occurred.

Immediately, Mae Zimmermann postponed her promised support and withdrew to the background. She was a far cry from Christabel, not the type that came out fighting at her partner's side against the world come hell or high water. The Cautious Widow, he dubbed her on that occasion. Even after the first trial was successfully concluded and their beautiful friendship bloomed anew, she didn't seem quite the same as before, so far as the money part was concerned. What if she was the type that turns the pursestrings into a leash? Well, he would see about that, in due time.

And then came that meeting, corner 58th and Madison—the sudden beginning of an abrupt end.

"Hey, John!"

"W-why, Mr. Walker! ..." (He had never got around to calling his father-in-law William, let alone Bill.) And he stood uncertainly on the curb, in the rush-hour traffic of a raw winter evening, while Walker leaned over from the wheel of a shining black convertible to open the door for him. "Come on in, John. I want to talk to you."

"Look, Mr. Walker," John said

in what he felt was a most appropriate tone of dignified aloofness, "if it's to throw more insults at me, the answer's no thanks, sir."

"I've had my say. Now I've something for you that'll please you."

John still hesitated, but some characters were honking like madmen behind the traffic-blocking convertible, so he stepped in. Without further talk Walker turned west to the highway, then north toward the Washington Bridge. Slowly John began to tense.

"Where you taking me?"

"Out of city traffic. The noise gets on my nerves nowadays when I want to talk. I'll turn off on a side road I know, where it's pretty quiet."

"Couldn't we talk quietly in a hotel lobby, or in your office?"

"To tell you the truth, John, I don't care to be seen with you after what happened."

John became more and more uneasy. Meanwhile, he was talking volubly: "Is this the very latest Cadillac, Mr. Walker? Are you satisfied? And all these electric gadgets, do they work?" That gave him a chance to caress the panels and locate the doorknob, for a quick getaway, should need arise. Walker's answers were curt, but courteous. He swung off the highway to the right, up a few bends, and in the woods, among the naked trees glistening with mist, he stopped the car with a jerk. It was so dark there, Walker's face was scarcely visible. He turned toward John, who froze, his hand just above the doorknob, ready to slide out. *The moment he takes his hands off the wheel, I open the door and scoot.* But Walker's hands, clearly visible in the reflection of the dashboard light, were resting quietly on the wheel.

"I'll get straight to the point, John. It may seem strange to you, but then you've never lost an only child. It's over a year now, but to me it's like yesterday. I've done a lot of thinking since the trial. Perhaps she was really suffering so much from shock that she didn't know what she was saying about you." (He avoided mentioning Christabel's name, John noticed, as if too precious to be spoken in front of him.) "Well, I decided that one thing I could do for her memory, or maybe just to satisfy myself, was to do something for you, John, because she loved you. Something I know she'd have liked me to do, even if she'd never admit it: letting you have that hundred and fifty thousand dollars you wanted."

"What!"

"I mean it. I can easily spare it. You know, I've practically retired since the accident, I have a good substitute at the office, my heart isn't in it any more. And now I've decided to go on a long, slow vacation. I'm leaving for Europe to-

morrow, on the *Constitution*. Most of my baggage is already on the ship. I have your money right here with me, in cash. I was just going to call you when I saw you in the street."

"But Mr. Walker!" John didn't know what to say, whether to be grateful or incredulous.

"But I want something from you," Walker said.

So there are strings attached, John reflected. *I should have known.*

"I wouldn't quite call them 'strings,'" Walker said calmly, and John had the eerie feeling that he was receiving an answer to his unuttered thought. "All I want is whatever personal belongings of hers are still in your possession. Letters and such. Anything. I have nothing, *nothing* tangible to remind me of her."

John felt relieved. "Why, of course, Mr. Walker, I'll be glad to oblige. Although, of course," he added quickly, "I'll miss those personal belongings."

"You have your own life to live, John. You don't want to be reminded of her all the time."

"I wouldn't quite put it that way, sir."

"But I do." Walker spoke without bitterness, matter-of-factly. He reached over to the back seat and produced a neat brown package.

"Here you are, John, a hundred and fifty thousand in crisp new hundred dollar bills. Fresh from the bank. Less bulky than the Collegiate Webster on my desk. I thought you'd prefer it this way. It saves misunderstandings with the revenue agents, for one thing. But of course if you'd prefer a check—"

"Not at all! Why, that's very thoughful of you, sir. Gee, Mr. Walker, I don't know how to thank you. When do you want me to bring you—'her' belongings? They aren't much, I'm afraid: a couple of letters maybe, a flower pot, she brought back from Venice, she was crazy about."

"There's no time like now, as she used to say. I'll drive you home right away, if you don't mind. I haven't too much time."

They drove back to town in silence. John relished the weight of the bills in his lap. At last he could prove to Mae that he was no whippersnapper, as she seemed to believe, but a big shot, practically a tycoon. Money breeds money, and it should prove far easier now to persuade The Cautious Widow to part with hers. He had landed a double-header, after too many lean years. Now he felt relaxed enough to expand in his seat, to breathe in deeply, notice the smell of newness—new rubber mats, new nylon covers, new finish—of Walker's new car: all reeking of prosperity, toward which his own course seemed definitely set. He stretched his legs, for the first time, as far as they would go—

without touching bottom. A new, roomy, comfortable Cadillac convertible at a time when the average citizen was holding back on buying so much as a new Chevy or Plymouth! It made a guy feel good...

"I'll let you out here," Walker said, double-parking at the beginning of the block where John lived. "Now stack that pile away where the ants can't get it, and bring me what I'm waiting for. If they make me move on, I'll drive around the block till you're back. Meet you at this corner."

"Right. It might take me awhile, though, to find those letters."

"Tell you what," Walker said. "It just occurred to me that I have a couple of things to wind up at the office. It's only a cat's jump from here. Mind bringing me those things down there? So I won't have to wait, and you won't have to rush."

"But of course."

"Since it's an office building you'll find the main doors closed at this hour, but you can come in the side entrance and take the freight elevator. It's self-service. Eighth floor, all the way down the hall."

"I haven't forgotten, Mr. Walker."

"Oh, and one more thing, John. I don't want anybody to know about our deal. Get it? Not a soul. I just wouldn't feel right—after the way I acted in court and all."

"Perish the thought, sir. Besides, whom should I tell?"

"I don't know. That...fiancee of yours, for one."

"Why tell Mae? She might misinterpret, as would others, and think I actually *sold* Christabel's souvenirs, for money! I wouldn't want that to happen."

"That's the spirit, boy. I just wanted to make sure."

The light was on in the hall of Walker's office, and John walked all the way down to the door marked PRIVATE. The last time he'd been in this place was—let's see—almost three years ago, when he came to ask for the very same hundrd and fifty grand that he got today. *All in due time* as Christabel would have said, or *Rome wasn't built in a day.*

Walker was sitting at his carved oak desk, between oak-panelled walls hung with old English prints and oils. A conservative man, this Walker. None of that modern white-wood or even glass-and-steel furniture for him, none of those Picasso *copies* (which could only be an improvement on the originals) hung sparsely on pastel-colored walls. The buildings he had designed were modern, but he didn't keep even a single picture of them in his private office. John noticed a big, shiny new cabin trunk in the far corner. Another thing he noted in putting his bundle on the desk: no picture of

Christabel. Maybe it was packed in the trunk.

The print of the bear hunt, however, was still there on the wall, behind Walker's shoulders. It had always held a strange fascination for John. Five or six hounds lay disembowled around the cornered bear, but that didn't discourage the rest of the pack from going after the quarry: they had sunk their fangs into its ears, feet, hams, flanks, tail, and were holding on for dear life although the bear was clawing and biting and twisting about wildly, so that a couple of them were sailing through the air, still attached to the bear by their teeth. Obviously, this picture was a symbol of that "doggedness" the old man set such great store by and which he was so distressed to find lacking in his son-in-law.

John saw him for the first time in full light since the trial. He appeared considerably aged. No taller than John, he had always seemed twice as powerful owing to his build, heavy-boned and heavy-set. His gray hair was much sparser, and that made his bluish jowl seem to jut out even more than usual. He wore a tailor fresh blue sharkskin suit and white-and-black patent leather shoes; he was all ready for his crossing. His mighty fists were planted solidly, almost menacingly on the desk top. His eyes—beady-looking over the swollen bags—were staring at John with ominous fixity.

Somehow, out there in the dark convertible John had not imagined he would look like this. His voice, too, was different when he announced:

"John Corleen, this is the end of the rainbow. I'm going to kill you." And one of his hands dipped into an open drawer and came back up with a pistol, a heavy .42 caliber, John realized at once, as his entrails filled with ice water.

In the silence that followed, the clicking and shuffling in John's brain was almost audible, its millions cells assorting, rejecting, selecting the punchcards of thought. TRAPPED—was the first signal the subconscious robot dropped in John's conscious mind, and *How do I get out of it?* was his mind's instantaneous reaction, while his eyes ran to the doors and windows, and his lips uttered blankly:

"I don't understand, sir." He licked his upper lip. His mouth was dry with fear.

"You will, John. You will." Hard as rock. Then, contemptuously: "Incredible how careless a body can get when blinded by greed!"

"You mean the money's phony?" John asked instinctively, while within the skullbox his brain was flashing desperately: *Time, time, you need time to think of a way out!*

"No, John, no," Walker was answering calmly. "The money's okay. But you won't be here to enjoy it."

"You let it cost you a pretty penny, Mr. Walker."

"I'd spend more to get even with you, Johnny boy."

"So you're not cured of your crazy idea! But you'll never get away with it."

"I think I will, John. In fact I've decided I won't just knock you off, but accomplish The Perfect Murder—the ultimate amibition of every criminal, though I'm not a criminal by a long shot. And I believe that just because I haven't the warped, twisted mind of a criminal, but that of a professional man of some renown, my chances of success are excellent. For one thing, nobody's seen you come. These walls are practically soundproof. The gun can't be traced: I found it years ago, loaded, on a vacant lot. And everything's ready to dispose of your body."

"A smart man like you should know that the only perfect murders are the ones without motives —or else when the victim had more enemies than the police can count, like that Serge Rubinstein a few years ago. But my only sworn enemy is Mr. William Walker—and even the cops will find that out eventually! And besides, I—I told Mae Zimmermann I was coming to see you. She was waiting for me at the apartment. We had a date."

"You're a liar, John. Mrs. Zimmermann's in Miami. I've had a tail on both of you, ever since the jury turned in that verdict. Not guilty, indeed! You couldn't even go to the bathroom without my knowing it. So quit bluffing."

John's mouth was getting drier. "Now tell me what you want and get it over with."

"I don't want much: only your skin, lover boy. But on my terms. Dying by a quick gunshot is too easy. I want you to squirm first, and squirm plenty. Otherwise I'd have hired a trigger man, or killed you out in the car. You were scared stiff when I stopped in those woods, weren't you?"

Anything to feed the conversation, to gain time for thinking. "Okay, you're psychic. I was scared. What of it?"

"So you felt relieved, you felt safe when you returned to the city lights, and my office didn't seem like the lion's den anymore after the dark lane, did it? And you simply loved me; you'd have followed me any place wouldn't you, in the first glow of gratitude for my little bonus?"

"All right, so you proved once more that you're smarter than I. But does that mean I'm guilty? Even if she *was* a nagger!"

"So you admit it now!"

"I only said she was a nagger! Does that mean I killed her, for God's sake? If all husbands were to kill their nagging wives you'd notice a hell of a drop in the female population of America."

"Well, then she was a nagger,

and not the only one. But maybe she had a reason, with you around, or more often not around—since you were running after that other lady."

"All right, so I wanted to marry Mae, and Christabel didn't want to give me a divorce. Does that make a man a murderer?"

"It made *you* a murderer, lover boy." Walker spoke slow and heavy, his eyes steady, only the flesh of his jowls shaking a little when he spoke—reminding John of Christabel's long jawbones, and of their bitter quarrels.

"It's not true, not true!" John's voice was shrill. "Even if Christabel did say what you said she said after the accident, who'd indict a man for accusations made in a state of shock?"

"I do—in this case. I knew my baby. Her eyes were the only part that wasn't burned. They stared at me, bigger than ever—you see, even the lashes were gone. It was the moment of truth. And why should my baby fib against you—whom she'd have defended even in her dreams?" Now his voice had turned emotional. It had that shaking undercurrent it had had in court. "And you know what she said?"

"I don't want to hear it—I've had enough! You're nuts!"

"She said: 'Daddy, my daddy, he let me die!' She said, 'Daddy, he just stood there, while I screamed, and after I had no more strength for screaming he still just stood there, calmly, WITH HIS ARMS CROSSED ON HIS CHEST, watching me. And when everything was over he sat in a chair and waited. And when I practically passed out, thinking it was the end, only then did he finally go to the phone and call the ambulance and then you.' And you should go scotfree, you low-down punk?" Pale with rage, his lips pressed together, Walker cocked the pistol with an audible click and aimed it slowly at John Corleen, whose hands, already clenched, whitened on the arms of his chair.

"Start squirming," Walker went on. "This is not going to be a mercy killing, lover boy. I'll allow you more time than you expect. Have you any prayers to say? I'll wait."

"How will you get me out of here?" John cried in despair. Time, time—he'd had oodles of it, but nothing had occurred to him yet, except the realization that a loaded gun was an irrefutable argument, which had short-circuited more than one human brain.

"You see that trunk, Johnny? It's all ready to receive your body, sealed in a plastic bag that's guaranteed to keep the moths out and the odors in. In the morning the American Express will pick it up and bring it to my ship. See what the labels on it say? WANTED IN STATEROOM. I want you in my de-luxe accomodations on the

Constitution, lover boy. And on some dark night during the crossing, I'll get out of my stateroom which opens directly on the Sun Deck, gently carry your hundred and seventy, seventy-five pounds of meanness to the railing, and dump you overboard. Much simpler than luring the body up here. A mess of cabbage was necessary to catch the greedy donkey. And another mess of cabbage," and Walker produced from the drawer wads of bills, "will take me anywhere I want. I've got two hundred thousand more here in cash."

After this his talk became ranting, as if he wanted to keep himself occupied while John was supposed to "squirm." And John was squirming all right, inside, his limbs as numb with terror as his brain was.

Then the unexpected happened. Walker opened a side drawer in his desk and took out a batch of photographs. John realized vaguely that it was in connection with something the old man had been babbling, about Christabel, of course.

"This is how she looked at eighteen," he was saying, perspiration beading his brow. "And here's how she looked after only five years of John Corleen, in case you've forgotten." He flung the pictures so hard across the desk that some dropped at John's feet, then he scraped for more pictures at the bottom of the drawer, where one seemed stuck. He had difficulty getting it out, with only his left hand, and he swiveled a little in his chair to peer into the drawer.

"You dropped a picture," John said, his voice shaking. He bent forward as if to pick it up, and bounding up from behind the desk he made a flying tackle for the gun, landing on the desk top with chest and stomach.

"So now!" he cried in triumph, waving his prize, while Walker slumped in his chair, deadly pale, staring. "Who's the punk now?"

"So you got out of it again," Walker said, almost calmly. "Congratulations. It goes to show, I suppose, that I'm not born to be a detective, nor a gunman either."

"You bet your sweet life you aren't. And now it's your turn for squirming, daddy-o."

"You don't want to kill me, John, now that you can leave safe, sound, *and* rich."

"How dumb can a clever man get? You'll have me locked up in the morning on a burglary rap."

"Not if I put it in writing that the money's a gift."

"I'll save you the trouble."

"So I sized you up correctly from the beginning: you are a killer—and every word my baby said was true!"

"You don't know how I chuckle inside each time I hear you call that big slob your baby!"

"Why, you punk!" And Walker's knuckles turned white. "But

I'll get you yet! Mark my word!"

"Say, haven't you noticed that we've changed courts, you old jackass?"

"She was my baby!" Walker sounded plaintive now. "Till you took her from me—and then let her die!"

"Okay, so I was in no hurry to save her. And you wouldn't rest till you got even. Now you'll see what your pigheaded stubbornness gets you: six bullets."

"Why kill me, John?"

"Because it would be a crying shame to waste this perfect set-up and your master plan, professor. Nobody's seen me, the room's soundproof, the trunk's all ready to take your body on a slow vacation while I change scenery with your dough—the hundred and fifty plus the ones in your desk. I guess the ugly corpse won't be discovered before the trunk gets to Customs in France. And I should let you go for another try to bump me off? So this is a case of self-defense: you really leave me no choice, daddy-o. And thanks for the lift."

"Wait—"

But John had already fired the first bullet.

John Corleen never had a chance. They would have caught him even if Walker hadn't made an appointment with his lawyer, for a leisurely farewell drink in his stateroom one hour before sailing time. Even if the lawyer had not been able to hold up the departure of the ship for fifteen minutes while he phone Walker's home and office, and then ordered Walker's luggage back on the pier. With the result that the trunk had to clear U.S. Customs before being readmitted and was opened on the lawyer's say-so.

If the trunk had sailed in the empty stateroom, John Corleen would have been caught just the same, sure as death. A little later, that's all. He would have been traced to any place he might have fled, through the new hundred dollar bills Walker had withdrawn from the bank the day he was murdered, and any denial would have been to no avail, owing to an incredible mistake *Walker* had made, not John. That's what burned him up—the Perfect Murder indeed! If John could at least let him *know* how idiotically he had slipped—not seeing the forest for the trees, as Christabel would have put it.

Walker had forgotten to call off the tail he had on John—that's all. Thus the private eye had seen John go to Walker's office. If he hadn't seen him come out again, the master plan was busted. As things went, it bust right in John's face . . .

It was already after his first talk with Seaspray Harrison that John knew he was in really hot water this time. And he understood also why the lion of the courtroom never lost a case: when a case

looked like a losing one, he turned it down—as he turned down John's.

Although John insisted that the first shot had been released while he tried to wrest the gun from Walker, the attorney who finally took John's defense refused to consider pleading accidental death or even self-defense, owing to all the cash of known origin involved and because more than one shot had been fired. He pleaded insanity, as the only chance of saving his client from the chair.

The trial was short. Whereas the jury in the first case had nothing to pin John down with, this jury had and did: Murder in the first degree.

Bits and flashes of these events now came back to John as he sat helpless under the leather hood. But somehow he felt like a man with a picture puzzle, who has a few pieces left that he doesn't know how to fit in. Perhaps this was due to his unwillingness to think, or to his inability to think clearly. He sensed dimly that he might yet be able to complete it, if the switch-thrower allowed him just a few seconds more. The robot of his brain, working more smoothly now that the calmness of resignation was superseding the tenseness of hope, started collecting, analyzing, discarding the myriad punchcards, whirring along madly to fill the gap in the picture.

What he had been unable to fit in, but was just beginning to fit now, was some of Walker's seemingly meaningless and disconnected phrases during the old man's final ranting: "I'll allow you more time than you expect... The cruelest death is the lingering of a healthy man who knows he must die—like those in the death house... You don't deserve a quick pistol shot, the easiest of deaths... I'll kill you with a time bomb... You still have a chance to save yourself by not pulling that trigger... And if what I say sounds senseless now, in retrospect you will see the light, lover boy." And come to think of it, it had been far too easy wresting the gun out of that powerful hand...

John Corleen did see the light at last, in the darkness of his hood—just before the first surge of current sent him leaping against his shackles. The completed picture puzzle showed him that William Walker, the brilliant architect, had indeed achieved his ambition of committing The Perfect Murder: the murder of John Corleen.

ONE CRIME TOO MANY

by Douglas Farr

JUDGE NORMAN KIRK gazed thoughtfully at the boy. They were alone together in the judge's chambers, and the silence between them had been long and somewhat uncomfortable. It was the judge's turn to speak. The boy certainly would not. He was too wary and too polite at the same time.

The boy was not returning the judge's gaze, but instead was staring humbly at the floor. So the judge had ample opportunity to study him, to recall and meditate upon his own awesome responsibility.

Paul Santin was only sixteen, but he looked several years older. He was a handsome lad. Dark, curly hair—perhaps too much of it, in the modern fashion of youth, and perhaps too well tended, too slick, too shiny. Smooth skin, unmarred by acne. Dark, brooding eyes, masked at the moment by long, almost feminine lashes. Mouth gentle and sensual. A big boy, with wide, athletic shoulders.

"Paul," the judge began hesitantly.

"Yes, sir."

In all their conversations, in court and in private, the boy had always said, "Sir." He had never sneered or snarled, never interrupted, never raised his voice, never argued, and as far as the judge knew, never lied.

"The crime you committed was a rather serious one, Paul, especially so considering your age. Armed, aggravated assault. Very close to murder. You attacked a middle-aged man, the father of four children, a breadwinner who was terribly important to the welfare of his family. You realize, I presume, the hardship his family would have suffered if this man had died."

"I didn't try to kill him, sir." It was a defense, inadequate, but still reasonable.

"I know you didn't intend to kill him, Paul. You intended only to rob him. But you hit him several times with a small iron pipe. Small, yes. But it was a weapon that could have killed him. In other words, you acted with a carelessness and a contempt for human life."

"I didn't want to kill him, sir."

Judge Kirk hesitated again, trying to assess the genuineness, if it was genuineness, in the boy's voice

A judge is one who judges; so it is well that the innocent keep under cover. And there's this to remember, when last seen Justice was stumbling around blindfolded and encumbered by a pair of fish scales.

and attitude. Was he truthful? Was he sorry?

"I think I can believe that, Paul," he said finally. "Which brings us to the crux of the problem. *Why* did you want to rob?"

"Money, sir."

"Money? I don't understand that. Your family is by no means wealthy. But they're not destitute either. Besides, you have a Saturday job. You earn a little money of your own regularly. Why did you need money so badly that you'd rob to get it?"

"I had a steady girl, sir. That takes money. More than I had."

It was the same explanation the boy had given previously. Not a good enough reason, of course, to assault a father of four in order to get money. But there was one big thing here in the boy's favor. He was telling the truth. He was not trying to lie out of it.

"Was the girl friend worth endangering a man's life? Was she worth the serious trouble you've gotten yourself into?"

The boy hesitated. His hands twisted in his lap, nervously perhaps. "No, sir," he answered after a time. "Now that I've had a better chance to think about it, I'd say she isn't worth it. If she was the right kind of girl, she wouldn't want me to rob to get money to take her out."

What better reply could the boy possibly give? "I'm glad you've come to that mature conclusion, Paul. It shows you're on the right track."

The boy glanced up for a second, a detectable moistness in his eyes. "But a little late, I guess, sir."

Judge Kirk leaned back in his swivel chair and pondered. The boy had accidentally, but perhaps wisely, put his finger on the awful dilemma. He was only sixteen. Was it already too late for him? His whole life spoiled, his whole future jeopardized, tainted, because of one tragic mistake? What was justice in a case like this? Give the boy a short punishment that would be the equivalent of a life sentence, when one added in the after-effects?

"I hate to think it's too late, Paul," the judge said.

The boy made no answer. He continued to stare at the floor, abject, beaten. More of a victim than a criminal.

"You're not my first case like this, Paul," the judge said sadly.

"But I've never learned what the best solution is. You have no police record. You're not what we term a 'hardened criminal.' You're just a child. But I have it in my power to send you to a reformatory, a corrective farm. This is not a prison. It's a place for young offenders. But I've seen the place. It looks and smells like a prison. And it's inhabited, partly at least, by a group which is distinguishable from real criminals only by age. I shudder to think what kind of companionship a boy like you would encounter in a place like that. I shudder to think of the things you'd learn there."

When the judge stopped talking, it was quiet again in the chambers. It was so quiet it seemed to the judge that the boy was not even breathing. He was just sitting there, tense, despairing, waiting for the axe to fall.

Judge Norman Kirk came to a difficult decision.

"I'm not going to send you to that place, Paul. I'm going to take a chance with you. I'm going to send you back to your parents, your school. By taking a chance, I'm going to give you another chance. You're not getting off scot-free, of course. I'm putting you on probation for two years. That'll mean . . ."

The boy glanced up wildly. There were real tears in his eyes now and they began to flow down his cheeks. "Oh, thank you, sir," he whispered. Then suddenly he was on his knees beside the judge's chair. "Thank you, sir."

Judge Kirk was happy and embarrassed, all at the same time. After so many impertinent, vicious young punks, to have a boy like this, genuinely contrite and grateful . . .

"I hope you'll prove that my trust in you is not misplaced, Paul . . ."

"I'm sure I did the right thing this afternoon, Celia," the judge said. "I think Paul Santin has learned his lesson. He made a mistake, but he's not a criminal."

Celia Kirk had listened stonily. She was an attractive woman, about the same age as her husband, but youthful rather than matronly in figure, her hair handsomely grayed, her face almost unlined. She shared her husband's interests, but not his attitudes.

"Are you trying to tell me, Norman, that a boy who would strike a man with a metal pipe is not a criminal?" Dismay was in both her voice and face.

"It is a criminal act, I'll admit, Celia. But when the malefactor has immature judgment . . ."

"Then he is allowed to go around hitting people that way."

The judge kept his temper. He was a mild man. And he was rather well aware of his wife's opinions on this subject. In fact, one of the projects of his life was

to convert her to a more charitable point-of-view.

"I told you, Celia, the boy is on probation. If he repeats the offense, we'll treat him differently, of course."

"That'll be small comfort to the next victim."

"There'll be no next victim." He meant it. He had scarcely ever spoken with a greater feeling of certainty.

"You guarantee that?"

"I guarantee it. Celia, I spent a lot of time with that boy. And remember, I've had plenty of experience with boys. Paul Santin is nothing like the rest of them."

She turned away from him. Her tone, when she spoke, was bitter but resigned. "I wish you were some other kind of judge, Norman. You don't belong in the Juvenile Court. You're too emotional, too soft. I remember when you took the job. You said, 'I want to do this because I want to work with kids. I want to help them. Because I like them.' It makes me responsible, I guess. I couldn't give you children. You don't have any of your own to spoil. But in a way, I'm glad now. You'd have been too indulgent a father."

Even when she talked like this, he did not get angry with her. He prided himself on his patience, his tolerance, his understanding.

"We'll see whether I've been too soft," he told her. "We'll make a test case of this Paul Santin. When this boy gets through his probation period, when he proves he has the makings of a good citizen, then I want you to be sorry for accusing me this way, Celia."

She didn't look at him when she answered. "And if the boy does something wrong and criminal and evil again, Norman, I want you to be sorry."

And it was Celia who had the vindictive pleasure of breaking the news to him that night five months later, when Paul Santin got into trouble again.

She was waiting up for him when he arrived home just past midnight. He'd been attending a meeting; he'd given a speech and, finally, he'd had to drive clear back across town. He was tired, a bit edgy, and naturally wasn't thinking about Paul Santin.

"Lieutenant Hanson called," she announced before he had even taken off his coat. "He said he had something you'd be interested in."

He looked at her. She was smiling, as if she had happy news for him. Yet he guessed from the quality of her smile that her news was really far from happy.

"They've picked up your favorite young hoodlum again. The Santin boy."

"Paul?" His fatigue slowed his mental reflexes. "What for?"

"Hanson didn't seem to want to give me all the details. But I gathered it's something pretty serious."

"Picked him up, you say?" The picture of Paul Santin, somewhat forgotten, began to re-form in his brain. "Where do they have him?"

"The Garrison Street Station. Hanson said you could phone him . . ."

He'd taken off his hat. Now he put it back on his head. "I think I'd better drive over there," he told her. The image of Paul Santin was clear in his mind now. He turned to go.

"But, Norman, it's late. Wouldn't a phone call do just as well?"

He faced her for a moment. It irked him that she should be so pleased that one of his pet projects seemed to have failed. "No," he said, "I'd better look into it personally. If you remember, Celia, you told me yourself that I'd be responsible if Paul Santin ever did anything criminal again. Well, I'm accepting that responsibility."

He turned and went out the door. It was a cold night. He had no desire to go out into the raw air again, but he walked resolutely to the garage and got into the car. The engine was still warm. He backed from the garage, then headed toward Garrison Street.

It was a fifteen minute drive. During that time he tried not to think, not to imagine what sort of trouble Paul Santin might be in. He wouldn't make the kind of premature judgment Celia had made.

The Garrison Street Station presided over one of the tougher, more unsavory areas of town. It was a grimy brick building that was rather in keeping with its surrounding environment. He parked in front and hurried inside.

The desk sergeant phoned for Hanson, and the Lieutenant came down the corridor almost immediately. "Hello there, Judge," he said. "I didn't mean for you to have to come down here . . ."

"I wanted to come," the judge said.

They didn't shake hands. Hanson had never been an especially friendly man. He and the judge had worked together on dozens of cases—maybe hundreds—but they had never formed any attachment for each other. Hanson was a squat, broad-shouldered man, powerful, hard, with a square, granite face and cold, expressionless blue eyes. A hundred per cent cop, fair all right, but tough. There'd been times before when he and Judge Kirk hadn't agreed on things.

"Paul Santin has been arrested again, is that right, Lieutenant?"

"Right."

"What's the charge?"

"Same as before. Man attacked, beaten up, and robbed on the street. Hurt fairly bad, but he won't die."

"You sure Paul Santin was responsible?"

"No doubt about it."

The judge winced. Hanson

wasn't a cop who would frame a kid. So if Hanson said that the boy had committed a crime, then he had.

He felt suddenly weary. What was the use asking any more questions, or of talking to the boy? He'd been wrong, that was all. Celia had been right. The Lieutenant had been right. Why not admit it?

"Paul Santin was on a probation, isn't that so, Judge?"

"Yes, that's right."

Go on, he thought bitterly, remind me of it. I made a mistake. But don't we all make mistakes? No, someone in my position can't make mistakes like this one. An innocent man is hurt, suffering pain, lying in a hospital bed, because of this mistake.

But the other stubborn thought stayed in his mind, too. Why had he taken such a chance on that boy? His first crime had been a serious one, not the sort that the criminal often goes on probation for. Why had he been lenient with him? It puzzled him now—the reason for his mistake.

"Lieutenant," he said, "may I have the whole story?"

Hanson led the way down the corridor and into his little office. There was a scarred desk, a swivel chair with a frayed cushion, and half a dozen straight-backed, wooden chairs.

"Take the comfortable seat, Judge," Hanson offered.

"No thanks."

Judge Kirk took one of the straight-backed chairs. Hanson seated himself behind the desk. They stared at each other for a few moments, two men with essentially the same job, different philosophies.

"You know Deering Street around Twentieth?" Hanson asked finally.

"Of course."

"That's where it happened. Eleven-fifteen. Man named Charles Metz, works an evening shift in a bakery. Has an old car, but it's being repaired. So he was walking home. Deering isn't a pleasant street, but it's not notorious. Metz had walked home many times before, he said. But this time, he was unlucky. Couple of kids jumped him, a boy and a girl. High school age. The boy did the rough stuff. Hit him over the head, from behind, with a bottle. Metz was wearing a hat, which was what saved him. He was knocked down, and the kids were going through his pockets. But the kids were unlucky too. Patrolman Joe Damiano was walking his beat, and he saw the whole thing from about a block away. He ran up. The kids saw him coming, and they ran. He fired two shots in the air. The girl got scared and stopped, but the boy kept going. Damiano kept the girl, phoned a report in quick. The girl's name is Betty Clark. She said her escaped companion was

Paul Santin. We put out a pick-up on Santin. A car went to his house, but he wasn't home. We staked it out. He lives two miles from Deering and Twentieth. At eleven-thirty-five he arrived, a little out of breath. We nabbed him."

Judge Kirk had listened carefully. He knew how to listen. That was most of his job. "Did Paul Santin admit the crime?" he asked now.

"No, he denies it. Claims he was with Betty Clark and half a dozen other kids till eleven or so. Then they started talking about pulling a job, and he didn't want to. Claims they argued, and he took off. Walked home. Doesn't remember the exact street where the argument took place, but admits it was probably within a block or two of Deering and Twentieth."

"What about these other kids? Who were they?"

"Betty Clark says there wasn't anybody else. Just she and Paul. He admits she was his sort of steady girl, incidentally. Also, he refuses to name the other kids. Says he doesn't know which one stayed with Betty, so he's not going to try to blame anybody."

"Typical teen-age loyalty," the judge said.

"Or a plain lie." Hanson made his observation calmly.

"What about Metz, the victim? Has he made an identification?"

"He was hit from behind. Didn't see anybody."

"So you're going solely on the word of this Betty Clark?"

"Also the admitted fact that Paul Santin was in the vicinity with Betty Clark just before the crime. Plus his record."

"You can't condemn a boy on his record."

"We do it all the time. You do it too."

"But sometimes we're wrong."

"Sometimes. Not often."

Judge Kirk was silent. He could think of nothing more to say in Paul Santin's defense. The Lieutenant was correct. The evidence was pretty clear.

Yet why did Paul Santin deny the crime? Once caught, he had admitted the first one. Was it because he realized how hard it would go with a second offender? The boy was smart enough for that. Still, he would know too that pleading guilty would make it easier for him. Curious...

But he just couldn't believe in the boy's guilt somehow. Stubborn pride, or real faith, or an instinct, or what? He had the facts now. He could go home, try to make the best of it. But he didn't want to give up. Maybe it wasn't as simple as Lieutenant Hanson imagined it was.

"You have both the kids in custody here?" he asked.

Hanson nodded.

"Would you consider it a breach of etiquette, Lieutenant, if I talked to them?"

"It isn't the usual thing..."

"Look, Lieutenant, I'm not impartial. I'll admit that. If this comes to trial, I won't sit on it, I promise you that. I'll disqualify myself. But right now I'd like to get the picture firsthand. I don't imply you're wrong about this, Lieutenant. But I know the Santin boy pretty well. And there's also the factor you've politely neglected to remind me of. I may be responsible for this situation."

Hanson shrugged and stood up.

"First I'd like to talk to the girl," the judge said.

Hanson went out into the corridor and barked an order. In a couple of minutes, a uniformed policeman brought Betty Clark. Hanson ushered her inside the office, and closed the door. Then he sat behind his desk again. The girl was left standing in the middle of the room.

Judge Kirk studied her. She was nothing new or original. Many just like her had paraded before him. Yet he wanted to find the particular thing about this Betty Clark that made her an individual, different in her own little way from all the rest.

She was about five-four, and she wore a red sweater and dark trousers, both garments too tight for her. Her figure was mature, though a bit thin. Obviously she thought her costume was becoming. How sad, he thought, the way these young girls tried so desperately hard to be very attractive.

She had a nice face, however. Or at least it would have been nice with a little less make-up, and if she weren't trying to look hard and superior and contemptuous. It was a little girl's face, hiding behind a brittle mask of self-assurance.

"You were with Paul Santin this evening?" he began gropingly, not bothering to identify himself.

"Sure," she answered, with an attempt at a sneer.

"You and he beat and robbed a man?"

"I didn't hit him. Paul did."

"Why?"

The question confused her. "You can't take a man's money while he's standing up," she said finally.

"Why did you want his money?"

She hesitated again, then said, "We were broke."

He shifted tactics. "Are you Paul's girl friend?"

"Sure."

"And Paul had escaped. Why did you inform on him?"

She took a long time in answering. Judge Kirk glanced over at Hanson. "I mentioned before this matter of teen-age loyalty. You know yourself, Lieutenant, what it is. So don't you find it rather odd that this girl should betray, of all her friends, her special boy friend?"

"They made me talk," the girl interrupted quickly.

Hanson looked uneasy at that. Judge Kirk saw his opening. "As I understand it," he said, "this girl identified Paul Santin to the policeman on the beat, Damiano. Are we to believe that Damiano gave her the third-degree, right there on the sidewalk, then phoned in, enabling you to pick up the Santin boy inside of half an hour?"

Hanson was considering the girl thoughtfully. "She gave the identification to Damiano all right," he conceded.

"Therefore she's lying about one thing," the judge went on. "Nobody made her talk. She identified Paul Santin willingly. Now I ask why." He looked back at the girl. "Betty, why did you give your boy friend's name to the police?"

The girl's confidence was thoroughly shaken now. She glared back at the judge, recognizing him as an enemy. But she didn't break as he had hoped she would.

"All right, I'll tell you," she said. "I was mad at him . . ."

"Mad at him!"

"Well, wouldn't you be mad if he didn't wait for you . . . just because he could run faster . . . I'm supposed to take the whole blame, huh? . . . well, he won't get away with that . . . he's the one who hit the guy, not me . . ."

"All right, Betty, all right!" Hanson interrupted her sharply. Then he looked toward the judge. There was a kind of satisfaction, almost triumph, in his grim expression. "Does that explanation satisfy you?" he wanted to know.

The judge nodded wearily. "You can go now, Betty," Hanson said. He stood up, opened the door for her, gave her back to the policeman in the corridor. She left without another word, although the judge thought he detected an air of triumph about her too, like the Lieutenant's.

Hanson went back to his desk, fished out a pipe and tobacco from one of the drawers, lit up, and began to smoke in silence.

"The fact remains," the judge said, "that she lied at first. Her second explanation, getting even for being left in the lurch, might also be a lie. I got the impression that she was thinking fast before she came up with that story."

"But it makes sense."

"But why did she try the other story first?"

"She didn't want to admit the revenge motive."

"All right, there is a revenge motive then," the judge pointed out quickly. "We agree there, Hanson. The girl hates Paul Santin. But mightn't it be possible she hates him for another reason, rather than for the one she gave?"

"If there is another reason, we don't know it."

"May I talk to Paul Santin now?"

Hanson shrugged, got up patiently from behind his desk, the pipe still in his mouth, and walked

out into the corridor. Alone for a moment, Judge Kirk tried to think. He had no devious plan for questioning Paul Santin, but perhaps he could decide better about his guilt or innocence if he saw the boy. But he had to be careful. He must not want Paul's innocence so badly, that the wish would seem like a fact.

There were footsteps at the door, then the two figures standing there —Paul Santin taller than the Lieutenant, more gracefully built, yet seeming like a helpless thing, his elbow in the Lieutenant's great paw. Hanson thrust the boy inside, not roughly but with unmistakable authority, left him standing in the middle of the room, and returned to slouch behind his desk.

The boy recognized the judge immediately and suffered a moment of confusion. He glared defiantly, then lowered his gaze to the floor. He shifted his feet, audibly in the heavy silence.

"Paul," the judge asked suddenly, "did you beat and rob a man last night?"

The boy looked up. "Everybody says I did," he answered bitterly. His former politeness was gone.

"What do you say?" the judge persisted.

"I didn't do it."

I believe him, the judge thought. He's trying to act tough because he's frightened. But believing isn't proving. And when circumstantial evidence, the testimony of a supposed accomplice, and the accused's record are all against him—the burden of proof is scarcely on the prosecution.

"Paul," the judge started to explain patiently, "you realize things look bad. Your girl friend claims you committed the crime. And your record is against you..."

"Sure," the boy answered quickly, "I did it before, so naturally I did it this time too. What are you asking me questions for? You won't believe me when I..."

"That's enough of that, Paul!" The judge spoke sharply. "Nobody has said yet that they don't believe you..."

"What about you, Judge?" The boy's eyes bored right into Judge Kirk. "What do you think? Did I do it or didn't I?"

"I want to believe that you're innocent. But I want to know everything before I decide. I have faith in you, Paul, but not blind faith. Don't you understand that? I want to help you..."

The boy glanced away, maybe a little ashamed of himself. It was hard to tell for sure with any of these youngsters.

"I'd like to find a way to prove you're innocent, Paul," the judge went on. "Remember, this has put me on the spot too. I was the one who released you on probation. Maybe we can work together, Paul. We've got to find proof."

Th boy considered. He looked quickly at the judge, then away

again. "I've already told 'em the only thing I know," he said. "I didn't have any money on me when they picked me up."

Hanson interrupted calmly. "Charles Metz claimed he lost about twenty-five dollars. Paul Santin had less than a dollar on him when we nabbed him. But he could have thrown the money away. They often do when they're being chased. And it's not likely that we'll find it."

"Paul," the judge said, "tell me about this argument you had with the group before you left them. I won't ask you to identify them right now. Just tell me what happened."

"They wanted to rob somebody. I didn't. So I left them and went home."

"But was there an argument?"

The boy hesitated. "How do you mean?"

"I mean, was your disagreement violent in any way? Or did you all part as friends?"

The boy refused to look up. "It wasn't much," he said. "They said I was chicken, that's all."

"What did Betty Clark say?"

"What difference does that make?"

"It might make a lot of difference, Paul. Look here, boy, you've got a lot at stake here. Betty Clark was supposed to be your girl, wasn't she? When you left the group, why didn't she go with you?"

"She said if I didn't have money in my pocket once in awhile, she wasn't going to be my girl any more."

"She wanted you to steal?"

"Sure, if that's the only way there was to get money."

Judge Kirk looked at the Lieutenant. The latter blew out a cloud of pipe smoke. "We have her word against his," he said. "Betty Clark has no record though, and this boy has."

Paul Santin sniffed scoffingly. But he didn't say anything. The judge pondered.

"There's the time element to be considered," he said finally. "We know the robbery occurred at eleven-fifteen and the capture at eleven-thirty-five. And there're two miles between the scene of the robbery and the boy's house. That means Paul would have had to cover two miles in twenty minutes."

"He was out of breath from running," the Lieutenant answered.

The judge picked up the discrepancy swiftly. "Lieutenant, you said before that he was merely out of breath. Now you say he was out of breath from running. Did your men actually see him running?"

The Lieutenant sighed. "Maybe not. Maybe he stopped to do push-ups."

Judge Kirk ignored the barb. "Paul," he said, "you have already told the police you left the group

at eleven. Tell me, is that correct?"

"I think it was about that time."

"Why do you think so?"

"I saw a clock after I'd gone a block or so. It said about five after eleven. So I decided it was late enough to go home."

"Did you walk or run?"

"I walked."

"Were you out of breath when you arrived home?"

"Maybe. I walked kind of fast."

"What route did you take home? What streets?"

"I don't know for sure. All I remember is Mayrose Boulevard. I walked on Mayrose for a couple of blocks at least."

"Did you meet anyone you knew?"

"No, sir."

There it was then, the whole problem. Did Paul Santin leave Deering Street at eleven o'clock, before the robbery, and walk the two miles in thirty-five minutes? Or did he leave at eleven-fifteen, the very time of the robbery, and run home in only twenty minutes?

"Paul," the judge said aloud, "to establish your innocence, we've got to pinpoint you somewhere along your route home at a time that would prove you couldn't have been at the scene of the robbery at eleven-fifteen. Do you understand that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you've got to think hard. If you didn't meet anybody you knew, you've got to think of something else that might give us this proof."

"I can't think of anything, sir."

The judge wouldn't surrender so easily. "You remembered Mayrose Boulevard. Think now. Is there anything you can connect with Mayrose Boulevard?"

The boy was looking at both of them now, no longer bitter or cynical, but alert, hopeful, almost fascinated with the problem just as a problem. His forehead was creased with thought.

"Did anything happen on Mayrose, for instance?" the judge persisted. "Anything with a time element in it?"

The boy brightened a bit. "I don't know about the time," he said, "but something did happen. I almost got hit by a car."

"You remember any details?"

The boy was thinking hard now. "I think it was at Mayrose and Thirty-third. Yes, I am sure it was Thirty-third, because there's that big, fenced-in old folks' home there. So I guess this car came down Thirty-third street. A jalopy with three or four kids in it. It turned into Mayrose while I was crossing the street. I had to jump back on the curb. The driver saw me, and he swerved way over on the wrong side of Mayrose. But he didn't slow down, just kept right on going. He was on the wrong side of Mayrose for half a block at least."

"You didn't get the license number?" the Lieutenant intervened.

"No, sir."

"What kind of a car was it?"

"A black '39 Chevvy, I think."

"You think?"

"Well, it happened kind of fast."

The Lieutenant snorted. "What time?"

The boy thought. "Well, I was more than halfway home. Eleven-twenty, I guess."

"You guess?"

The judge interrupted now. "If he was at Mayrose and Thirty-third at eleven-twenty, he could scarcely have been at Deering and Twentieth five minutes earlier. That's more than a mile in five minutes."

"If," the Lieutenant repeated. *"If* we can find some kids who were *maybe* driving an old black Chevvy, and *if* those kids admit they almost ran over a pedestrian, and *if* they somehow remember the time of said near-accident as being precisely eleven-twenty . . ."

There was a silence in the room again. Lieutenant Hanson knocked the contents of his dead pipe into an ash tray. He looked almost smug. Paul Santin bit his lip, perhaps to hold back tears. He was a smart boy. He didn't have to be told twice that his story was hopelessly inadequate.

He's innocent though! The thought pounded in the judge's brain. He's not lying. He's telling the truth. I know the difference between the sound of the truth and the sound of a lie. And in that instant, Judge Kirk made a rash decision.

"Lieutenant," he said, "I'd like to talk to you out in the hall."

Hanson smiled, heaved his bulk out of the chair, and followed the judge. It was the judge who shut the door behind them, leaving the boy alone in the office.

"Look," Hanson began, "that kid may try to climb out my window . . ."

"Don't talk nonsense." The judge spoke softly. "Now listen to me, Hanson. I attended a meeting of the Juvenile Assistance Foundation tonight. I drove home part of the way down Mayrose Boulevard. I saw that close call the boy had. Of course I didn't recognize the pedestrian as Paul Santin, because I didn't stop. In fact, I tried to follow the car. I thought that driver ought to be arrested. But the car was going much too fast. I didn't get the license number, but I'm absolutely sure it was an old black Chevrolet."

Hanson's eyes narrowed to slits. He spoke with contempt, enmity. "That's an interesting story, Judge," he said. "Now I suppose you'll add to it that this happened at exactly eleven-twenty."

The judge had gone this far. He couldn't stop now. "A couple of minutes earlier than that, in fact. I looked at my watch after I stopped chasing that car."

"Judge, do you really expect me to believe you?"

"You believe Betty Clark, who has admitted taking part in a major crime. I am Judge Norman Kirk, a highly respected citizen in this town. Whose story do you prefer?"

Hanson chewed his lower lip, measuring his opponent, weighing the chances. Then without another word he shouldered past the judge and clumped down the corridor. The judge watched him go till he turned a corner. Then he went back into the office.

"Paul," the judge said, "I've just told the Lieutenant that I saw that near-accident which you described. I also told him it happened just before eleven-twenty."

The boy looked startled. "Did you see it?" he wanted to know.

"I was driving home about that time. I could have."

"But you didn't really?"

"No . . ."

"Then why did you say you did, sir?"

"Because it was the only way to save you. And I believe you're innocent, Paul."

They looked at each other for a long time.

"No, sir."

"No what, Paul?"

"I can't let you tell a lie like that for me, sir. You might get in trouble. And even if you didn't . . . Well, I just don't want you to do it, that's all. I'll get out of this some other way." The boy's eyes were soft now, as was his voice. "But I appreciate your trying, sir . . ."

Neither of them would meet each other's gaze then. The judge walked over to the window and stared out into the darkness. The boy didn't move. They waited together.

Maybe it was five minutes, maybe ten, when Lieutenant Hanson came back into the room He crossed immediately to behind the desk, sat down heavily. He was chewing on an unlighted cigar.

"Betty Clark changed her story when I told her we had witness for this kid's alibi," he announced briefly. "She says now Paul Santin had nothing to do with the crime." He looked up at the judge from under veiled lids, his expression inscrutable. "I guess that was the strategy you had in mind, wasn't it, Judge?"

Judge Kirk looked across the room at Paul Santin. The boy seemed to be waiting eagerly for his reply, wanting him to say that he had spoken as he had to break down the girl's story. Well all right then, that's the way it had to be. So it wasn't to justify himself—it was to preserve something that this confused boy believed in—that he gave the required answer.

Later, alone with his own conscience, he could wrestle with his two lies.

Pride goeth before the fall, and an ambulance cometh shortly thereafter. That is the theme of this slight epic which is both worthwhile and interesting, a rare combination indeed.

DARK ENCOUNTER

by Donald Campbell

He had been shot. That was all he really knew for sure. First of all, he had heard the noise of it. It had filled the room, deafening, shocking his ears. And he knew instantly what it was, would have known even if the bullet had not hit him.

But it had hit him, of course. There was shock there too, of something hard and irresistible crashing into his body. And then the pain, the blinding moment of excruciating agony, the pain engulfing his whole body, his body consumed in it as if by a flash of fire.

The pain was gone now though. He could be thankful for that anyway. He felt nothing, saw nothing, heard nothing. The pain was gone, and the blackness which had snuffed it out had not lifted. And he was alone, he knew somehow. The person who had fired the shot must have departed.

Yet he was conscious, in some strange way at least. The inner part of him anyway. For here he was, able to think with perfect clarity. Think...

What was happening to him? Was he dying? For the first few seconds, he had been too overwhelmingly aware of other things, the sound of the shot, the pain, then the phenomenon of the descending darkness. But now, inhabiting that darkness alone, the question could no longer be avoided.

Death...was he experiencing it now? Death had intrigued him for so long. And he'd formulated his own theories about it. Was this it? How could a man tell? Here was the one human experience for which there was no guiding experience.

Should he be afraid? Was he afraid? He didn't really know. Hadn't he always insisted that death is the end of everything; that beyond it there is nothing?

"Death is the end of everything," he had said. "Beyond it there is nothing."

Elizabeth, his wife, lay stretched on the bed before him. Yet it had been a long time since he had actually regarded her as his wife. How could he? This woman here on the bed was certainly not the pretty, almost beautiful woman he had married some twenty-six years before. This woman was scarcely more than a skeleton, with only her eyes alive, burning with fever and fear.

Her dry lips moved grotesquely. "Don't say that, Gerald," she begged him in a barely audible whisper.

"But, my dear, I'm merely telling you the truth."

"If it is the truth, I don't want to hear it."

He had to smile. "Elizabeth, you're still such a child, aren't you? You try to seek comfort in lies and delusions. Try to act and think like an adult. You've managed finally to accept the fact that you're dying, and I congratulate you upon that. Now you must learn to accept the further fact of what death is. On this point we have the accumulated evidence of centuries. Evidence that so many people—like yourself, for instance—have simply refused to recognize. Human bodies die and decay, finally crumble into dust. That's all. We see that. Yet there is this persistent, wishful thinking about a soul, an after-life, immortality. But we don't have the slightest shred of evidence to prove such an existence after death."

"Or to disprove it, Gerald." The woman on the bed fought him with what little strength she had.

He smiled again, confident of the superiority of his position. Elizabeth was arguing from emotion, fear. His argument was intellectual, logical.

"All right," he said, "coddle yourself if you insist. Go on pretending, if you can. So you convince yourself there is an after-life. Let's suppose for a moment there is. But are you quite sure that's a comforting thought? Might not eternal oblivion be preferable to eternal life? Quite depends on what this eternal life amounts to, you see. Oh, I know how you've embraced religion, Elizabeth. But isn't that wishful thinking again? What is this immortality really like? Can we actually be sure it's a pleasant existence? I've heard you religious people use the word 'Hell,' for instance."

The sunken eyes stared up at him, and he saw the fear glowing brighter in them. "I'm not going to Hell, Gerald... I've done nothing wrong..."

"My dear, I didn't say you'd done anything wrong. On the contrary, I think that by most accepted standards you've been a rather good woman. But does it follow that this God of yours is good; tha

He is going to reward you? Maybe everybody goes to Hell. After all, if we're going to imagine things, if we're going to accept things without proof, it seems no more unreasonable to imagine an unhappy immortality than to imagine a happy one."

"Please, Gerald go away..." The corpse-like creature on the bed was much too weak to scream, or even to move her hands to close up her ears.

He stood there for a long time, silent, not in deference to her wishes, but rather out of curiosity. Death was indeed fascinating, no matter what the philosophy of the viewer. How the human being struggled against death, so afraid that not even the pain and despair of the most hopeless life—as Elizabeth's was hopeless—could push them into the beckoning arms of death. Fighting, always fighting to the very last ounce of dwindling strength. Ridiculous...

In the midst of his cogitations he was suddenly aware that the door behind him had opened, and that he was no longer alone with his wife. He turned around.

It was Paula, Elizabeth's younger sister, who had come to live with them since Elizabeth's illness. She wasn't as pretty as Elizabeth had been, had never married. All the affection she might have lavished upon a family of her own, she'd been giving to her sister. And right now she looked like she was in one of her possessive, motherly rages.

"Gerald, what are you doing here?" she snapped. Her voice was harsh and unpleasant, her plain, lined face contorted with hatred.

"I'm talking to my wife," he answered calmly. "Don't I have a right to do that?"

"You have no right to torture her."

"Torture?" He laughed. "I'm trying to help her. I'm trying to set her straight on a few vital facts, that's all."

Paula's fury stopped just short of physical action. For a moment she couldn't speak. Then she said, finally, "Sometimes I think you're simply a madman, Gerald Arnot. You imagine you're really a superior intelligence, who knows things that puzzle the rest of the human race. Then at other times I'm just as convinced you're a fiend, that you're taking advantage of a helpless, dying woman just for the sadistic pleasure of it."

"Interesting alternatives, Paula."

"But I don't actually care what you are. I'm interested in my sister, not you. And I'm going to see to it that you stop what you're doing to her. I've begged you, Gerald. I've threatened you. Nothing seems to have any effect on you. So I'm going to fight you. Every time you come into this room, I'll be here. You've always managed to sneak in, as you did today. But no longer. I'm going to live, sleep, eat my

meals in this room. I'm going to stand guard..."

"Till Elizabeth dies?"

"Till she dies."

"That may be a long time."

"I don't care how long it is. But you're not going to have one minute alone with her."

"My dear sister-in-law, I have my rights as a husband."

"If you insist on your rights, as you call them, I'll call the police."

They stared at each other. Paula did not flinch. He hesitated, finally glanced toward the woman on the bed. Elizabeth was motionless. It was difficult sometimes to tell whether she'd heard things or whether she hadn't. Anyway, he couldn't very well talk to her any more with Paula present. As for Paula's camping in this room, well, he'd see about that. He turned away, finally, and walked out.

That was in the middle of August. Paula stuck to her resolution. She didn't stir out of that hot, fetid room for the rest of that dying summer. Every time he went to see Elizabeth, Paula was there, ready to dispute whatever he might say. So he didn't say anything. Finally, he stopped going to Elizabeth's room. He wandered morosely through the big house, sometimes passing a word with the housekeeper or the cook or the nurse. But mostly it was a completely silent house, with the pall of death hanging over it.

It was on the last day of September that the end came. He wouldn't have known of it had not Paula for some strange reason—conscience perhaps—chosen to inform him of it. She sent word by the nurse.

"Mr. Arnot, Miss Keith instructed me to tell you that your wife is dying. If you'd like to come up and say good-bye..."

He climbed the stairs. The door of Elizabeth's bedroom was closed. He knocked softly. "Come in," Paula's voice called to him. He paused a second to square his shoulders, take command of himself. Then he opened the door part way, and slipped inside.

Although it was in the middle of the afternoon and sunny outdoors, the room was dim, Paula apparently thinking it was most proper to keep the drapes drawn. He had to go all the way to the bedside before he could see his wife clearly. And what he saw sent a strange thrill up his spine.

It wasn't that Elizabeth had changed so much physically. She could scarcely have grown more frail, more skeletal. No, it wasn't that. But there was a change in her nevertheless. It was as if he saw her in transition between life and death, as if Elizabeth lay there on that bed and yet was not there. Or perhaps that something within her was within the very act of departing. It was strange. One really didn't see this phenomenon, but sensed it rather.

"You can speak to her if you promise not to say anything to frighten her." This permission came from Paula, of course, at his elbow.

But what could he say? Something emotional, sentimental? He really could not pretend that he loved this dying woman. What then? He struggled to say something. It was embarrassing to be so tongue-tied.

"Elizabeth," he managed finally. "This is Gerald."

"Gerald?" The closed eyelids fluttered, but did not open. "I am dying, Gerald."

"Yes, my dear."

"I see nothing but a peaceful light, Gerald. Light. Just light."

He hesitated. He was, he admitted, a little bit awed by the proximity of death. And yet his intellectual convictions were as strong as ever, weren't they? So he had to say it.

"Still deluding yourself," he said.

Elizabeth's eyelids opened for one last, brief second. He did not know if she had heard him or not. Her expression was vague. But an unmistakable serenity had suddenly taken the place of the fear and uncertainty she had known during that interminable summer.

Then a trace of a smile touched her lips. And she was dead...

So was he himself dying now? Surely, having seen Elizabeth die, he should have firsthand knowledge of the subject.

Yet the whole thing remained elusive. Elizabeth's last word had been "light," and he was in a blackness now. Time was passing. It hadn't stopped. Some ticking clock inside him told him that somehow. Yet he did not seem to be traveling through the blackness. There was no sense of transition from life to death such as he had noticed in Elizabeth. So perhaps there might still be hope.

It was then he began to hear the voices. They were far away at first, and the words indistinguishable. But finally they came closer. He could hear what they were saying, and could identify them after a fashion. Three masculine voices, all completely strange to him.

"Well, here he is."

"This is Gerald Arnot, huh? I've heard the name."

"Yeah, real rich. Look at this house, for Pete's sake."

"Well, just goes to show you. Money isn't everything."

"Yeah, you can't take it with you."

But I'm not dead, he wanted to shout at them. I can prove it, because I can hear every word you're saying. Look closer...touch me... you can feel that I'm warm...that I'm still breathing...

The horrible thought came to him suddenly that maybe they were touching him. These men were obviously the police, so they

wouldn't be afraid of touching a corpse. And surely they were smart enough to do that at least. But he couldn't feel their touches. I must be numb, he decided, as well as paralyzed and blind. Of course, because though I'm conscious I no longer feel pain either. But I'm not dead.

He fought down his rising panic. These are just dumb cops, he told himself. There'll be a doctor examining me eventually, and then the truth will be known. All right, I'm in bad shape now, but doctors can work miracles these days. I might pull through. I don't want to die.

"Okay," one of the voices said. "I guess we'd better go through the routine though. There's not much doubt, of course. I'm going to talk to this Keith woman..."

Paula Keith. Gerald watched her all through the funeral services for Elizabeth. He didn't bother to pretend any emotions himself. Why play the hypocrite? Whom did he have to impress? Let Paula take care of that department.

She cried a great deal. Softly at first, all through the sermon, supplying the appropriate background for the ridiculously solemn words. Then again in the big black limousine on the way to the cemetery. One would think that eventually she'd become dehydrated. But she never did. At the graveside she put on the best performance of all, disturbing the peaceful, quiet air with loud, mournful w a i l s. Embarrassed everybody. Peasant...

Back home, later in the afternoon, they met in the library. Paula still wore her black silk dress, but she was dry-eyed finally. Which strengthened his opinion that all the weeping had been only for public display. But she knew she couldn't fool him.

"I have good news for you, Gerald," she began. "I'm leaving your house today."

"That is good news," he agreed. "I was afraid you were going to hang around and discuss Elizabeth interminably."

"Hardly with you," she said.

"I'm glad we understand each other," he told her. "And I'm glad you're going to take your mourning elsewhere. By the way, where will you be going? Perhaps you'd better leave an address. When we clean out Elizabeth's belongings, we might come across some little keepsake you might want to have. I could send it along to you."

She eyed him coldly, calmly. "I once wondered whether you were a madman or a fiend, Gerald. Now I see that you're both."

He smiled. In a way he was sorry that she was going. It might be as pleasant and rewarding to argue with her as it had been with Elizabeth. Perhaps he could persuade her to stay somehow. If he could only think how.

"I'm neither," he said meanwhile. "I'm a philosopher."

"All right, salve your conscience with that idea if you can."

"At least I'm not a hypocrite. I can't pretend an emotion I don't feel."

"No, you can't pretend, because you can't even imagine what love or any decent, noble emotion feels like."

He laughed softly. Yes, he rather liked talking and arguing with her. Elizabeth had been ill for so long that she'd lacked the strength to stand up against him. And besides, Paula possessed a kind of spunk that Elizabeth never had.

"Do you dare to call it a noble emotion," he asked, "to feel any kind of affection or compassion or regret over a dead, decaying corpse being dumped into the ground?"

Ah, he caught the reaction in her face. A kind of alarm at being made to hear something she didn't want to hear, to face a truth she didn't want to face. She recoiled from him, her pale face still a shade paler.

"We buried only her body," she said.

"Oh yes, I've heard that theory. There's always her soul, of course. All right, if we didn't bury that part of her, where is it?"

"I don't know..."

He laughed louder. "You admit you don't know. You're talking about some part of a human being that you've never seen, alive or dead. But you're consoling yourself with the idea that this thing exists. It's not worthy of you, Paula. At least Elizabeth had some motivation for believing in this nonsense. She was afraid to die. But why should you want to believe it?"

He had poked at a raw nerve. Paula responded wildly, almost hysterically "I loved Elizabeth," she shouted at him. "So I must believe that some part of her is still alive. I want to see her again..."

He pursued her. "More make-believe, eh? More wishful thinking. You want it to be a certain way, so you try to believe it has to be that way. But you don't really believe it, do you, Paula? Down deep you know the truth. Elizabeth is d e a d...gone...finished. You'll never see her again, not unless you dig her up. And then you'll be surprised at what you find. It won't be Elizabeth as you remembered her..."

Screaming, Paula ran from him. He followed her leisurely. Out into the front hall. Up the big staircase. Where to now? Where could she think she could hide from him? Ah yes, she was going into Elizabeth's room. To look for some little object there to console her, some little thing she might imagine could still be a part of Elizabeth, some tangible item she could clutch to her breast because Elizabeth's non-existing soul wasn't available for such an embrace.

She had closed Elizabeth's door behind her, but she hadn't thought to lock it. He opened the door and went inside. Paula was at the far end of the room, her back to him, rummaging through the drawers of Elizabeth's dressing table.

"Elizabeth is dead," he told her, slamming the door behind him. "There's nothing here, but the odor of her dying. What are you looking for?"

Paula whirled. "This," she answered.

There was a small gun in her hand, and it was pointing at him.

"I bought this a long time ago," she went on. "I was going to kill my sister when the pain got too much for her. But I never had the nerve. Now I'm going to kill you."

He was too surprised to be afraid. "Why?" he asked her.

"You have such interesting theories about death, Gerald. I'm going to give you the chance now to really find out."

That was when she shot him.

But he hadn't found out yet. In one way at least, that was a comforting thought. He had foiled Paula. He was still alive.

Almost as if to prove the fact of his being alive, voices came again.

"Shall we go after the bullet?"

"I suppose so."

"But why bother? The Keith woman has confessed to the shooting."

"It's routine. Just to make sure. They want a ballistics check on the bullet. And a verification of the cause of death."

But I'm not dead, he wanted to shout. and couldn't.

"The cause of death? Ye gods, man, is there any doubt? All right, all right."

A long pause, while Gerald Arnot in a sense figuratively held his breath—though of course he had no control of any of his muscles. And he didn't feel anything either, even though those men were probing in him for a bullet.

"All right. There it is. The slug is sitting there right in his heart. He died of the gunshot, and his death was instantaneous..."

But I'm not dead!

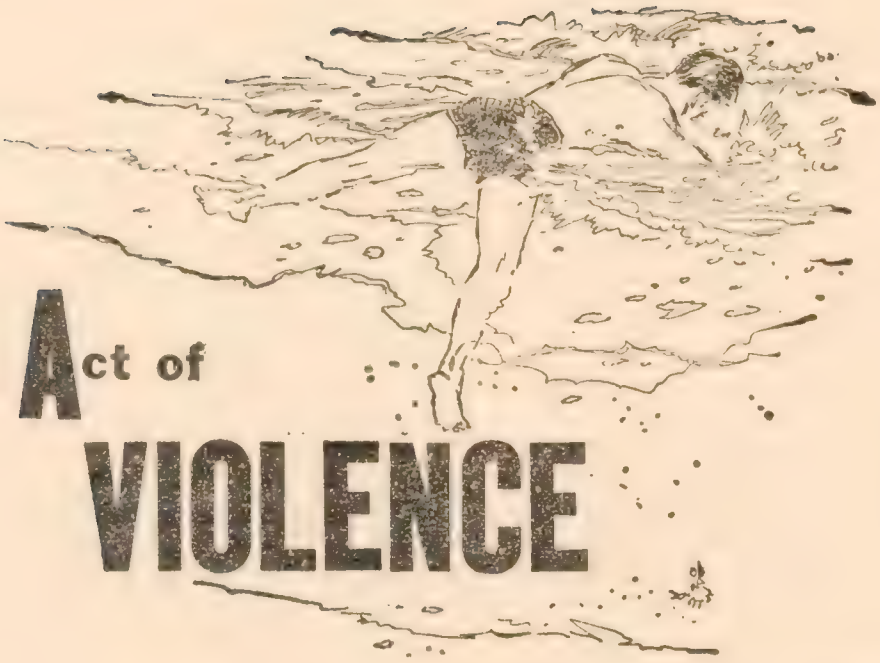
I'm not dead...I know that... because I can hear you...even though I can't see you...or feel your instruments in my heart...

My heart!

Yes, I am dead. I must be. But somehow I am conscious too. I inhabit this blackness. I am not passing through it I am *in* it. And this blackness is somehow part of me. Trapped in my body. Is this what they call the soul? But why doesn't it leave this body? Paula you've had your revenge. Why doesn't some hand lift me out of here? I don't want to stay here! Where is that light of which Elizabeth spoke?

"Take him to the morgue. boys."

My God, how long will it go on like this?



Act of VIOLENCE

by Arthur Gordon

LONG after he had banished it from his conscious mind, the scene kept coming back to him in dreams, kept coming back with appalling clarity, as if burnt into his memory by some searing psychic process. There it always was: the beach white as ivory in the moonlight, and the little waves creaming warm around his feet, and the crumpled figure face down in the gleaming water. And he would wake with a muffled cry of terror and protest...

It had all started out as a casual holiday weekend, nothing more. He had finished his business in Jamaica and was ready to fly back to Miami. But Paxton, the manager of the Kingston office, had dissuaded him. "Why not give yourself a break, Johnny, old boy? Hop across to the cool side of the island and spend a weekend at Haddon Hall before you go home. Their station wagon meets all the planes at Montego Bay. It's a grand spot: good food, horses, tennis, everything. Best beach on the island. No reason why a gay bachelor like you shouldn't find a pretty girl, either..."

He had found the girl, all right. He found her in the station wagon that met him, as promised, when his plane landed. It had already

collected three passengers from the Miami plane. Two were young, self-conscious, hand-holding—obviously honeymooners. The third was this girl.

Following the driver who carried his bags, he saw her profile framed in the station wagon window, and his first odd impression was that she was waiting for something, waiting with a kind of controlled intensity. And this was strange because she *was* waiting, they were all waiting for him, and the fact that they were waiting should not have been quite so noticeable.

Then, as he approached, she turned her head, and he felt the impact of chestnut hair and sun-warmed skin and eyes the color of sea-water, eyes that looked at him appraisingly and did not seem displeased by what they saw. He came up to the car through the hot white sunshine and held out his hand. "I'm John Aiken," he said. "Hope I haven't kept you waiting long."

The girl's hand felt cool and strong in his. "I'm Jan Livingston," she said. "No, not long." Her voice was pleasant, friendly, but again for half a second he had the strange intuitive impression of calmness stretched tight over tension. Then it was gone. The bride said, "We're the Nesbitts," and gave him a shy smile, and blushed. The driver said, "All ready now, sar," and opened the door.

Aiken folded himself up and slid in beside the girl. He glanced once at her left hand. It was ringless. He said, keeping his voice more casual than he felt, "Your first trip to Jamaica?"

She nodded, but did not reply, so he tried again. "They tell me this place has everything: riding, tennis, sailing, swimming—what's your preference?"

They were moving, now, through the airport gate, along the winding coastal road. To their left was the incredible jade-and-turquoise sea. The girl was watching it. "Swimming, I think. Definitely swimming."

He glanced at her bare brown arms, her lithe body. "You look as if you might be a good swimmer."

"Yes," she said. "I am. That

This is essentially a boy meets girl story, with an act of violence thrown in to make the entire proceedings palatable. Please remember that in my stories in addition to love, I invariably throw in hate. And at no additional charge.

sounds immodest, but it's the one thing I know I do well."

He leaned back, careful not to touch her, amazed at the power of the impulse he felt to do just that. "My swimming's pretty rusty, I'm afraid. Maybe you could give me a few lessons."

A furrow appeared in her smooth forehead, as if somehow the suggestion did not please her. But it was gone instantly. "Why, certainly," she said. "I'd be glad to, Mr. Aiken."

The formality did not please him. "If you're going to be my swimming teacher, can't you just call me Johnny?"

Her mouth curved faintly. His nostrils caught a whiff of the perfume she was wearing: subtle, fragrant, feminine. "All right," she said. "Johnny."

For an hour, then, they drove steadily eastward. In the back seat, the honeymooners chattered happily. Everything delighted them: the cane-fields, the banana trees, the great Jamaican vultures swinging silently in the luminous air. Once a mongoose flashed like a big weasel in front of the wheels. Jan Livingston sat quietly, hands folded in her lap. Now and then, as the station wagon swung around the turns, her shoulder touched Aiken's lightly. He was always aware of the contact, and he had the feeling that she was too, but she gave no sign.

An hour of this, and then ahead of them they saw Haddon Hall, high on a promontory above the sea. A former sugar plantation, converted now to an exclusive guest-house with its own palm-fringed beach and a magnificent view. They turned off onto a dusty road that climbed steeply, and Aiken was aware suddenly that the girl's face was pale and that her hands were no longer folded loosely; they were clenched tight. He said to her, softly, "What's the matter? Is something wrong?"

She shook her head; her hands relaxed. The station wagon swung into a courtyard filled with sunlight and silence and drunken splashes of color from hibiscus and bougainvillaea. A white-coated servant opened the door. "Welcome," he said in his sing-song, Anglo-African voice. "Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to Haddon Hall!"

The place was everything that Paxton had said it would be: wide verandas, cool white-plastered walls, big dim rooms where polished silver gleamed. The proprietress was a sensible Scottish woman named Mackie. She showed Aiken to his room, urged him to ring for anything he wanted, suggested he might like a swim before tea-time. The beach, she said, was a quarter of a mile away by road. The station wagon would be leaving in ten minutes for anyone who wanted to go.

Aiken said, staring out of the window at the distant mountains, "Do you have many guests here now, Mrs. Mackie?"

"Just a handful; the season's about over, you know."

"And will everybody be going down to swim?"

"Oh, no! Some are playing tennis; that's what our newlyweds want to do, I believe. Some are out riding. But Miss Livingston wants to swim. And Captain Davis usually does. He's from South Africa—you'll like him. There are bath houses at the beach where you can change." She looked at him quizzically. "That Miss Livingston's a pretty girl, isn't she? Quite unusually so." She gave him her pleasant smile and went out quietly, not waiting for a reply.

Aiken unpacked quickly, wrapped his swimming trunks in a towel, went down the broad, curving stairs. The big room that served as a lounge was empty, and while he waited he looked through the leather-bound guest-book that lay on the center table. Some of the names were familiar: socialites from New York, celebrities from the entertainment world. But it was the next-to-last entry that caugh his eye. *Mr. & Mrs. Ace Murdock, Miami.* And under that a single name: *Antonio Capa.* Both entries were dated the previous day.

Aiken closed the book with a faint grimace of distaste. He did not know Ace Murdock, but he knew who he was. Everyone in Miami knew who he was: a gambler, a connoisseur of race tracks and of women, a fixer of things, a big-time operator. Not outside the law, necessarily; at least, not on the surface. But wherever big money moved, Ace Murdock moved also. If you wanted to put on a championship fight in Miami, or sell a multi-million dollar hotel, Ace was always involved. There were men who hated his guts, and it was said that he never was without a bodyguard. It was also said that women—some women—found him as irresistable as he found them. All in all, an American type: the worst. And here he was, at Haddon Hall...

Behind Aiken, a British voice spoke suddenly, "Hullo, there."

He turned and saw a tall, rangy man in a khaki shirt and knee-length shorts, blue eyes frank and friendly. "Davis is the name. Mrs. Mackie says you're for a swim. Mind if I join you?"

"Why, no," said Aiken. "Of course not." He did like the man; there was something solid and direct about him.

"Station wagon's waiting," Davis said. "And Miss Livingston's in it. My word, do you have many in the States like her?"

Aiken smiled. "A few."

"Enough to make a chap change his nationality! Come on; there's only an hour till tea-time. They're

damnably prompt about meals and such."

The beach was a scimitar of flawless sand, backed by coconut palms that hissed and rustled in the wind. The two men changed quickly, then walked down to the water's edge. Aiken stared at the sea, emerald where it flowed over the shallows, then shading to amethyst and indigo, peaceful, beautiful...

Davis read his thoughts. "It's a lovely spot, no question about that. And a little of it's all right. But I wouldn't want to live here. Fine for a vacation, like this. But the flowers are too ruddy big, and the stars are too bright; the sun's too fierce, and the sea's too blasted blue. Your emotions are affected, too. If a man annoys you, you want to kill him. And if you see a pretty girl... Well, I've got a perfectly good fiancee back in Capetown, but..."

He stopped in mid-sentence; Jan Livingston had come out of the other bath-house. She was wearing a black bathing suit with no ornamentation. It was designed for maximum freedom in the water, and it fitted her like a second skin.

Davis gave an almost inaudible whistle. Aiken knew why, and he didn't blame the South African, but he felt a flash of anger so vivid that it startled him. He did not have to analyze it. It was pure, male-animal jealousy. He did not want Davis or any other man appraising this girl, admiring her.

She came up to them, fitting a white cap over her chestnut hair. She stood there for a moment, arms raised, the lines of her body sharp and clear against the aching blue of the sky. Then she plunged through the first waves, hit the water in a shallow dive, and disappeared.

They waited. Fifteen seconds. Thirty. Forty. Davis said, uneasily. "D'you think she's all right? She's been under a..."

Abruptly the white cap re-appeared, fifty yards beyond the breakers. A brown arm beckoned them to follow; then the cap disappeared again.

"My word," Davis said, "she's a ruddy seal! Go ahead, join the lady. I stay where I can touch bottom if I have to."

Aiken swam out slowly through the sun-flecked water. Beside him, without warning, Jan Livingston's glistening face appeared. "Oh," she said, "it's wonderful down there. Come on; I'll show you." She held out her hand. "Take a deep breath. Take several; it puts oxygen into your blood-stream."

He did as she ordered, then let her draw him under. They slanted down until Aiken could feel the thrust of pressure against his eardrums. The water was incredibly clear; it was like being led by a mermaid into some silent, silver world. A reef slid slowly beneath

them. Near it, on the sand, Aiken saw a giant conch shell. His companion pointed and tugged at his hand, but he shook his head. They were deep enough; already he needed air.

For a moment her fingers tightened; then she let him go. He saw her spiral down, arms and legs glimmering, as he drove for the surface. He made it, lungs bursting, and sucked in great gulps of air. He was still breathing hard when the girl appeared.

"Got it!" She held up her trophy.

"You're amazing," Aiken told her. "What do you use for air?"

She laughed. "Just a matter of practice. I've been swimming since I was three . . ." Her voice changed suddenly. "We seem to have visitors."

Aiken swiveled himself around. A pair of horses were picking their way down the road that led to the beach. The riders were a man and a woman—the woman's hair flamed like brass under the slanting rays of the sun. A third horseman appeared. Behind Aiken, the girl spoke. "They must be the Murdocks. Mrs. Mackie said they were out riding. Think I'll swim in and say hello."

Aiken stared at her. "You know Ace Murdock?"

"No," she said softly, "no. But I've heard of him." She tossed the conch away and started back, driving through the water with a powerful, six-beat crawl. Aiken watched her walk out onto the beach, nod in response to Davis' introduction, then reach up and stroke the nose of the horse that carried the first male rider. The man leaned down and spoke to her, and even at that distance there was something about him that made Aiken's scalp tighten. Something cold, something arrogant, something—predatory. And evidently Murdock's wife resented something too, for suddenly she wheeled her horse around, gave it a cut with her riding crop, and went galloping back up the road that led to Haddon Hall.

Slowly Aiken swam back to the beach. As the distance narrowed, he saw that Murdock was a younger man than he had expected—and handsome, if you cared for the type. His black hair gleamed; his light, almost colorless eyes contrasted oddly with his sun-tanned face. He barely nodded when Davis introduced Aiken. He was looking down at Jan Livingston's bare shoulders and the warm, ivory column of her throat. She was smiling up at him, and Aiken had the queer impression that she was completely aware of Murdock's interest, was inviting it, was offering herself in a deliberate way for his inspection and approval.

Behind them, the other rider pulled up. He dismounted awkwardly, and Murdock laughed, straightening in the saddle. "What's the matter, Capa? Getting

a little saddle-sore?" It might have been a good-humored jibe, but it was not. There was a jeering note in Murdock's voice, as if he felt a secret contempt not only for Capa, but for the whole human race.

Capa hunched his shoulders and said nothing. Watching him, Aiken felt surprise. He had expected a bodyguard to be the gorilla type. This was a small man with slender, fragile hands and a face that looked almost babyish until you glanced into his eyes.

Swift and silent, a shadow raced across the beach. Looking up, Aiken saw a great vulture soaring over them, wings rigid, head outthrust. Murdock nodded at it. "Twenty bucks says you can't do it again, Capa."

The little man said softly, "You must like to lose money." He seemed to coil himself inward in one smooth indescribable motion, and suddenly there was a gun in his hand, a long-barreled automatic that looked like a small-bore target pistol. It coughed three times, not loud, and overhead Aiken heard two sickening little slaps as bullets met feathers. The vulture staggered, lost altitude, then recovered and began to climb. The gun coughed again. The great bird went into a whirling dive and plunged into the sea.

For five seconds, nobody spoke. Then Murdock said carelessly, "So all right. So you win your twenty bucks." He leaned forward and spoke to the girl. "How about a drink in the bar when you're through playing mermaid?"

She hesitated. "I'll think about it."

He straightened up. "I'll look for you." He reined the horse around. "Come on, Capa." He drove his heels into the animal's sides. The little man re-mounted and followed.

Jan Livingston stood looking after them. Then, with a twist of her shoulders that might have been a shrug or a shudder, she walked over to the bath house, opened the door, went in.

Aiken glanced at Davis. The South African's face looked grim. "A couple of pretty repulsive types, if you ask me. That Capa is a sadist, he enjoys senseless killing. As for Murdock, the fact that he has a wife doesn't seem to bother him at all."

Aiken said, "Does it bother her?"

"His wife?" Davis rasped the back of one big hand across his chin. "The fair Elaine is not very good at concealing her feelings. You'll see."

Tea was a ritual at Haddon Hall. They served it on a flagstone terrace that was roughly triangular, with an old bronze cannon at the apex, tranquilly pointing to the sea. Beyond the cannon, a footpath dropped steeply to the beach. Mrs. Mackie sat in an arbor

covered with flame-vine and poured tea for those who wanted it.

Elaine Murdock did not appear at first. Her husband came, still in riding clothes, with Capa silent and watchful behind him. He glanced around at the other guests with his cool, contemptuous stare, then went straight up to Jan Livingson. "The bar's not officially open yet," he said. "But I can probably persuade the bar-man to give us something better than tea."

She looked up at him, the late sunlight gilding her skin, making her eyes a tawny color. From where he sat, Aiken could see a pulse throbbing faintly in the hollow of her throat. She nodded, and stood up. Murdock put his hand under her elbow. They moved away together. Everyone watched them. In the sudden silence, Davis cleared his throat, a sound eloquent of disapproval. Aiken heard a step behind him and turned. Elaine Murdock had come out onto the terrace.

He saw instantly that once she must have been a beautiful woman. But now the hollows in her cheeks were too deep, the lines around her mouth too bitter—and the erosion, Aiken felt, had not been caused by age so much as by frustration and jealousy and anger.

The French doors closed behind Murdock and the girl. Elaine Murdock stood rigid, gazing after them. Capa went up to her, offered her a cigarette, lit it for her. She moved to the far end of the terrace and stood by the cannon; Aiken could see the tip of the cigarette tremble. After a few moments she turned, crushed the cigarette under her foot as if trying to obliterate it altogether, crossed over to the French doors, went through them.

Aiken stood up suddenly, moved by anger. Why should Murdock be allowed to humiliate his wife in this way? Why was Jan Livingston acting like a cheap little pick-up? Abruptly, he became aware that Capa was watching him with eyes as expressionless as the eyes of a shark. He stared back, not trying to conceal his animosity, until the other looked away. Then he went into the big house.

In the bar, a white-jacketed attendant was filling two tall glasses. Ace Murdock sat sideways on his bar-stool, one hand resting with casual possessiveness on Jan Livingston's arm. He was looking up at his wife with a kind of sardonic enjoyment. "I thought you'd had your quota, my dear. But if you really need another drink, take mine. No doubt it'll enhance your fatal charm."

With one convulsive movement, Elaine Murdock picked up the glass and hurled it into the big mirror that backed the bar. The mirror splintered into fragments that sprayed all over the astounded bar-man.

For a long moment, nobody moved. The bar-man ducked and came up with a towel. Jan Livingston pushed back her stool. Her face was pale. She went out of the bar quickly, but she did not go alone. Aiken was three steps behind her. He caught up with her quickly. "Wait a minute!" His breath came heavily, almost as if he had been running. "What do you think you're doing? What are you trying to do?"

She looked at him levelly. "What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean! You've known Murdock for less than two hours. You know what kind of a man he is. Yet you—you sit there and let him paw you! You . . ."

Her eyes blazed suddenly. "What I do is my business, isn't it?"

"Not if it affects other people! You're humiliating Mrs. Murdock. You're embarrassing all of us. You're . . ."

She turned away from him without a word. He watched her move up the stairs, out of sight. He heard a slight noise behind him and swung around. Capa was lounging against the wall, watching him. Aiken said, furiously, "What do you think you're staring at?"

The little man hunched his thin shoulders. "Nothing much," he said. "Just you."

Dressing for dinner, Aiken told himself that Jan Livingston was right: what she did was her own affair. If her idea of a holiday adventure was a sordid entanglement with a man like Murdock, then obviously she was not worth worrying about. He had misjudged her, that was all. From now on, the best thing to do was ignore her.

But this was not easy. At the long, narrow dinner table she sat opposite him, wearing a dress of pale yellow that left her shoulders bare. Her hair was brushed straight back and tied with a yellow ribbon, like a little girl's, and the combination of innocence and sophistication was devastating. Every time he looked at her, Aiken felt the impact of it, and he knew Ace Murdock did too.

Beyond her husband, Elaine Murdock sat tense and silent, eating almost nothing, crumbling bits of bread with thin, nervous fingers. Her face was flushed; it was obvious she had been drinking heavily. Across the table Davis tried, not very successfully, to engage her in conversation. Beyond Davis, Capa watched everything with his blank, empty eyes.

The moon rose out of the sea, orange, enormous. After dinner, there was coffee in the lounge. Aiken was asked to make a fourth at bridge, but declined. In spite of all his resolutions, he was watching Jan Livingston. She was being friendly with the other guests, talking with them, laughing with

them. But the focus of her attention—Aiken was sure of it—was Murdock. She kept him constantly aware of her.

A calypso band appeared on the terrace. The young honeymooners went out and began to dance, dreamily, in the silver light. Ace Murdock moved indolently across the room, said something to Jan Livingston. She smiled and nodded, and they went out together.

Through the open doors, Aiken saw the girl move into Murdock's arms. The music was soft and tender and she danced close to him, her dress a pale smear in the semi-darkness. Elaine Murdock was watching too; Aiken saw her drive her fingernails into the palms of her hands.

Other guests were drifting out on the terrace, and Aiken went with them. Near the far end he saw Murdock and the girl, still dancing, but so slowly that it was more like an embrace. Abruptly, the revulsion and fury he felt were more than he could stand. He turned, went rapidly down the flight of stone steps that led to the courtyard. He went blindly through it, out into the road.

Behind him, the muted music went on mockingly. Ahead of him, the road sloped away, white as chalk in the moonlight. He began to walk along it, taking the fork that led to the beach. His shoes kicked up little puffs of silvery dust; his footsteps sounded loud in the listening night. He stopped abruptly, a hundred yards from the house, shoulders hunched, fists jammed into pockets. Why should he care what this girl did? Until twelve hours ago he hadn't known that she existed. What was it to him if she chose to behave like a tramp? *What was it to him?*

Just off the road was a great banyan tree, the coiled roots like twisted serpents in the dark. He moved over to it, sat down, lit a cigarette. Overhead the moon sailed, placid and indifferent. Somewhere back in the hills, a dog howled. The cigarette burned down until it scorched his fingers. He flipped it away in a shower of sparks.

He heard their footsteps before he saw them. They came around the bend, walking fast and close together, the man's shirt-front and the girl's dress luminous in the moonlight. They passed within twenty feet of Aiken without seeing him, so close that he could distinguish the yellow ribbon that Jan Livingston wore in her hair, could see on Murdock's face the arrogant, satisfied look of a man on his way to a lonely beach with a pretty girl, a pliant girl...

"So what if she did see us," Murdock was saying, "so who cares? She'll have a little tantrum, and then drink herself into her usual..."

The words trailed away. The footsteps receded, were gone. Back

in the hills, the dog howled again. Then silence.

Aiken sat still, trying to keep his mind a blank, trying not to let his imagination follow the two figures down to the shadowy beach. But it was no use: he felt an anger, a sense of outrage so strong that when he tried to light another cigarette, the match trembled in his fingers. What was it Davis had said about this place? *Your emotions are affected, too. If a man annoys you, you want to kill him. And if you meet a good-looking girl . . .*

He made himself sit there until the fine, rapid tremor subsided. He took a deep breath, stood up, moved back onto the road. He would not stay here any longer than was necessary. He would go back to his room now, pack his bag, leave early in the morning.

He started walking back up the road to Haddon Hall. The anger seemed to have burned itself out; he felt drained, exhausted. Let them go, he thought wearily, let them keep their moonlight secrets. Let them walk the beach together, let them swim in the quicksilver dark, let them . . .

The impact of the idea was like a blow. He stood there, rigid, remembering the silent underwater world he had shared with the girl, the grip of her strong fingers as she drew him deeper, her fantastic ability to swim under water, to *remain* under water . . .

He made a strangled sound of protest, deep in his throat. It was all clear now: the tension he had sensed in the girl, her brazen behavior were all part of a plan, a carefully conceived and executed plan to lure Ace Murdock to the beach, alone and at night, and from the beach into the water. She was going to kill Murdock in the one way that would be both easy for her—and unprovable. She was going to drown him.

Aiken whirled and began to run, back down the dusty road, back toward the beach. He had no interest in Murdock, dead or alive. But whatever her motive, whatever her reason, he did not want Jan Livingston to become a murderess, and ruin her life.

Under his feet, he felt the hard surface of the road change to soft sand. He raced through the grove of palm-trees that backed the beach and halted, fighting for breath. For a moment he saw nothing; the beach seemed deserted. But then something moved against the moonpath, and he saw the silhouettes of Murdock and the girl at the water's edge. Jan Livingston was wearing her black bathing suit and white cap; Murdock was in swimming trunks. A wave broke white around their ankles, and Aiken saw Murdock draw the girl close and kiss her.

He took a step forward, but before he could move out of the shadow of the trees he saw Elaine

Murdock run across the sand from the footpath that dropped in a steep zig-zag from Haddon Hall's terrace. Straight toward her husband she ran. He turned to face her, and as he did Aiken heard something cough, a harsh, metallic sound, and he saw Murdock fall, face down in the gleaming water.

Jan Livingston screamed, the sound high and shrill as Aiken raced across the beach. Water swirled around his ankles as he caught Murdock by the shoulders and dragged him up on the sand. He looked once at the ruined face, then rolled the body over while the dark smear widened. A shadow moved, and looking up he saw Capa staring down at him.

"You fool!" said Aiken hoarsely. "Why did you give her the gun?"

"Because she asked for it," Capa said. "And because he had it coming to him."

The police had come and gone, the long questioning was over; they were alone. Outside, the first hint of sunrise tinted the eastern sky with a gentle beauty.

"Yes," the girl said dully, "I planned to kill him. He was a blackmailer, an extortionist."

Aiken nodded.

"If it hadn't been for him, my husband would be alive today. "But— Do you want to hear all this?"

"If you want to tell it," Aiken said. "Might be good for you to talk it out, at that."

"What makes it all so horrible is that my husband was really innocent. Yet this man framed him. Then drove him relentlessly, viciously until he—until he took his own life. I told myself killing Murdock wouldn't be murder. It would be justice. And besides I didn't want this terrible sort of thing to happen to anyone else."

Aiken said, "Do you think you would have gone through with it?"

"Yes," she said. "The way you go through a nightmare."

"I still don't think you'd have done it," Aiken said.

"I had every intention to. I found out Murdock was here. I made a reservation in my maiden name. And I played up to him, and if I could do that I could have—I could have—"

She turned away from him suddenly and covered her face with her hands.

Aiken stood looking at her. He wanted to console her, but he didn't know what he could say. For the time being it might be best if he just kept quiet.

Here we have the eternal conflict between Derring-do and Should-I-dare. But, fortunately, there is drama even in indecision. Vacillation fairly crackles in the morning, when I must make a choice between ties and whether or not I should wear a shoulder holster.

operation staying.alive

by William Link and Richard Levinson

STAFF SERGEANT BENNY KELLER sat in the barracks Day Room reading the same magazine endlessly. He was a small, nervous man, a veteran of Bastogne and Korea. The sergeant stripes had always pleased him; he was perfectly satisfied with the rank. His goals, simple and clearly defined, were to make sure the barracks stayed clean (no butts in the latrines, men,) to keep his full-field pack rolled in a seamless tube, and to alienate no one, from battalion commander to bat-

talion goof-off. The enlisted men, scenting his hesitancy, had affectionately named him, "Old Play-It-Safe."

Sergeant Keller put down the magazine and looked at his watch. It was almost one o'clock in the morning. Like most week-end nights, the enlisted men were staggering back from Munich bars and strip-joints, their eyes glazed, their voices loud. Sergeant Keller went out on the town rarely; when he did, he took a quiet beer in a country gasthaus or visited a pudgy-armed seamstress he had met in his first month overseas. But Sergeant Keller was content to remain in the barracks on wild Saturday nights, making sure his men got back before curfew.

Keller stood up and walked to the fuse box. He checked his watch again to be sure, then switched off all the hundred-watt lights in the Day Room. He bent over the pool table and sunk a few balls that clicked and glimmered in the cold starlight. The outer door banged open suddenly and a weaving trio entered, their breaths smoking white in the fresh blast of air. They edged, laughing, along the pool table, rocking and sliding. "Put on the damn lights, Keller," one of them said.

"Can't. It's almost oh-one-hundred, men."

"Ol' Play-It-Safe," someone snickered.

Keller smiled. He watched them tumble into the Charge of Quarters' room to sign in. A few minutes later they were talking in the barracks, preparing for sleep.

Sergeant Keller replaced the cue-stick in its stand and stared through the window. There were deep, blue drifts of snow outside; the messhall shone like an ice-cube. Keller lit his pipe and waited. He knew there was one EM missing: Pete Cobb, a tall, morose man who worked in the battalion message center. He had never liked Cobb. The man was a shifty-eyed shirker who always escaped morning clean-up by claiming work in the message center.

A shadow moved by the messhall. Keller strained his eyes and saw a tall, wobbling figure, sloshing its feet in the snow. Looks like Cobb, Keller thought. It better be. I wouldn't want to have to report him.

He waited, puffing rapidly on his pipe, cracking his knuckles in the growing chill of the big room.

The outer door opened and the figure came in. It bent over the radiator for a moment, seeking the remaining warmth. It was breathing heavily, hoarsely.

"That you, Cobb?" Keller asked.

The figure nodded and took a few steps forward. Keller made out Cobb's large, blunt face, bruised with shadows.

"You're the last one. You just made it in time."

Cobb grunted.

"What's wrong? You're out of breath."

"I was runnin'. Hadda make curfew."

Keller studied him. "You look like you been in a fight or something."

Cobb was silent. He looked around the room, shoved his big hands into his pockets.

"Well, get to bed. I wouldn't want the O.D. come checkin' around and findin' you still up."

Wordlessly, Cobb turned and went down the long corridor. Keller watched him stop and turn into the shower-room. A moment later he heard the stinging splash of water on the tile floor. What the hell's he takin' a shower for? Keller thought. Suppose the O.D. comes over?

Sergeant Keller closed the Day Room door behind him and walked softly down the dark corridor. Steam was pouring from the open shower room. He stopped at the doorway and looked in. Cobb, naked, stood in one of the stalls, soaping his furred flanks.

"You were in a fight, weren't you?" said Keller.

Cobb looked at him, his face perfectly blank. Then he turned back into the rushing water.

Keller shrugged and walked the rest of the corridor to his room.

There were men shouting and whistles blowing. The lights were on. Sergeant Keller squirmed to a sitting position in his bed. It was dark outside the window of his room and the C.Q., a small, fat boy, stood in the doorway. "Sarge?" he said.

"What's going on?" Keller asked. "What time is it?"

"Just got a call from the O.D.," the C.Q. said. "We gotta get the company out on the street."

Keller began pulling on his field trousers. "Why?"

"Don't know, Sarge. He just rang up and said to get 'em out."

"Okay, okay. I'll take charge."

Keller fumbled into a woolen shirt and then went out to the corridor. Young soldiers came sleepily from the squadroom, pulling on articles of clothing. "What cooks, Sarge?" "Where's the fire?" "It's three o'clock in the mornin'!"

"Fall out in the company street," Keller said. "On the double."

He marched down the middle aisle of the squadroom, calling at huddled forms wrapped in khaki blankets, p r o d d i n g half-asleep bodies sitting motionless on the edges of beds. "Let's go, men! Fall out! Shake it!"

Cobb was still under his blankets at the end of the line. Keller put a hand on his shoulder. "Let's go, boy."

"Okay," Cobb mumbled. He rolled over, his white face sullen.

Back in his private room, Sergeant Keller slipped into his fatigue jacket. He felt vaguely uneasy. Combat boots were thudding

down the hall, men groaned and shouted. It's some type of shakedown, Keller thought. But what kind? There wasn't any liquor in the barracks, the Old Man knew that. They wouldn't pull a medical check at this hour of the night. Maybe it had something to do with the gasoline that was being stolen from the motor pool. But what could they prove by routing the men at three in the A. M.?

Zippering his jacket, Sergeant Keller walked quickly down the corridor and out into the frigid air. He frowned, looking at the company street. The entire battalion was lined up, shuffling nervously, irritably in the freezing darkness. The blue arc-lights were lit on the fronts of barracks, their glow weak and wavering on the pounded snow.

Keller put on his gloves and took his place at the head of headquarters company. "Sarge," somebody called, "what's happening?"

"I know as much as you do," Keller said.

"Some guy said there's Criminal Investigation men in battalion headquarters. Are there?"

"Don't know," Keller said. "Quiet in the ranks."

Keller stood naturally at ease, doubling his hands behind him, working them for warmth. He saw a small group of men approaching from battalion headquarters, their stride briskly professional in the snowy roadway.

"That's them." someone said. "CID in plainclothes."

"Knock it off!" Keller said.

The group came to a halt in front of headquarters barracks. There were four strange men in olive overcoats with Lieutenant Bracken, the battalion O.D. They stood silently for a few moments, surveying the ranks. Then one of them, a tall man, nodded to the Lieutenant.

"This will be short and quick!" the Lieutenant shouted. "Just follow instructions! If not we'll be out here all night!"

The battalion had hushed. The street was silent except for the ragged moan of wind from the hills. Keller studied the faces of the four men in plainclothes. They were CID all right. He had seen their kind before, in Mannheim on a larceny investigation. But why were they here?

"Everyone will hold out their hands palms-up!" Lieutenant Bracken shouted. "Palms-up! If you're wearing gloves, get them off! Come on! I want to see those hands!"

Keller stripped off his gloves and extended his arms. The CID men had split, one man to each company. The one for Headquarters came over to Keller. He turned the stabbing beam of a large flashlight on the Sergeant's palms. Try as he could to control them, Keller watched his thin hands tremble. "Turn 'em over," the man said.

Keller obeyed. The flashlight washed them again. Then the man turned and marched over to the first rank.

Time dragged in the company street. Keller was too nervous to check his watch. The silence was broken only by the thin shuffle of feet on ice, a few soft questions and tense answers. Sometimes the flashlights bobbed, touching the panes of second-floor windows.

Finally, the group of four went back to Lieutenant Bracken.

"All right," Bracken shouted, "Company sergeants will dismiss their men!"

Keller turned, pivoting, and gave the order. The men stirred and sluggishly began to file back to the barracks.

The C.Q. was waiting for Keller in his room. "I got the whole story," he said proudly.

Keller sank down wearily on his bed "What?"

"Somebody killed a German taxi driver, an old guy. Rolled him and took all his money. Right outside the gate too!"

"When?"

"A little before one o'clock. The CID were called in by the M.P.'s. They narrowed it down to somebody in this battalion."

Keller nodded and began pulling off his boots. "Figures. That's an old trick of theirs, checkin' the hands. They figure the guy might've got scratched or something."

"Well, like I said, it was an old guy. Couldn't have been much of a fight."

Keller felt the muscles tighten suddenly around his heart. Fight. Cobb had been out of breath when he came in. And he had returned at one o'clock.

"What's wrong, Sarge?" the fat boy asked.

Keller dropped his boots with a clatter on the floor. "Nothing, son. You better get some sleep."

The Sergeant undressed and lay wide awake under his blankets. All he could think of was Cobb's face and the hoarse rasp of his labored breathing.

The following afternoon, Sergeant Keller left his section early and returned to the empty barracks to shower and shave. In the Day Room he checked his name again on the Guard Roster. There was no mistake—"Keller, Benj. SGT of the Guard." His eyes ran down the rest of the column to a name under "Privates of the Guard:" Peter Cobb.

Under the needling pressure of the shower, Keller tried to relax, but he couldn't. Shaving in the steamy mirror he nicked himself twice. He went to his locker and dressed slowly for guard mount. On his way to the arms room to secure his weapon, he passed Cobb walking toward the barracks. Their eyes met, held, and then both moved on. Keller's face felt hot in the icy air.

He handed the private his receipt for his carbine and waited while the boy hunted among the gunracks. "Here you are, Sarge."

Taking the weapon, Keller ran a cleaning rod through its bore, inspecting the small grains of dirt on the dry cotton patch. He rubbed linseed oil on the stock, polishing it with hard strokes. Footsteps sounded on the stairs. A moment later Cobb, dressed for guard mount, came into the room. Keller didn't look at him, kept his eyes fixed on the gleaming stock of the gun. He heard movements that told him the private had brought Cobb his weapon.

Steeling himself, Keller looked up at Cobb. The man was swabbing his bore with a cleaning rod. Keller tried to keep his face relaxed. There was nothing to be afraid of, the gun was empty. But tonight there would be a steel clip in Cobb's carbine—with three bullets resting on the coiled spring to be ejected, if desired, into the weapon's chamber. And Cobb would be carrying that weapon for several hours while he walked his post.

Keller slung his rifle and ducked through the door. While descending the stairs to the ground level, he thought he heard Cobb laugh.

Guard Mount lasted only a few minutes. Keller had prepared the privates of the guard for inspection, his eyes not once meeting Cobb's. Captain Campbell was the Officer of the Day. He was a huge, solid man, well over six feet tall, with a tired, remote face. During the ceremony he asked few questions of the men, grunted a great deal, and seeemed satisfied to get out of the cold when it was over. Keller didn't like him, never had. He was a lazy officer and most people knew it.

Keller found out exactly how lazy Campbell was a few hours later. The Captain called him into the O.D.'s private quarters, where he was already stretched out on a cot. "Keller," Campbell drawled, "I want you to make a special check on the late relief at the motor pool. Okay?"

Keller nodded stolidly, thinking: the so and so. It's his duty to go out there and do the checking. I'll never get any sleep.

"Gasoline's being stolen," Campbell continued. "Whoever's getting it has been selling the stuff to the Germans. Maybe you'll catch somebody tonight. Anyway, alert the guard and keep tabs."

Keller nodded.

"That's all, Sergeant. And get one of the privates to go down to the snack bar and bring me a black and white milkshake."

Keller went quietly back to battalion headquarters. The long building was empty now, most of the men had gone to the barracks or cleared post. Keller turned the lights on against the gray, hazy

dusk that had descended like snow from the Bavarian hills. He sat down behind the desk in the big, overheated room and looked at the field telephone. He twisted nervously in the chair, drummed his cold fingers on the blotter. Finally, he picked up the receiver and rang the guard room. A corporal answered.

"Everything—all r i g h t over there?" Keller asked. He found it difficult to control his voice.

"All shaped up, Sarge."

"Tell me—when does Private Cobb go on relief?"

"Cobb? He's on last. Eleven o'clock. Walkin' the motor pool."

The motor pool. God, he'd have to check him. Cobb all alone down there with a loaded carbine.

"Sarge? You there?"

"Yes."

"You wanna be relieved for chow? I just ate, I'll cover for you."

"I—don't feel particularly hungry. Thanks anyway." Keller hung up. He rubbed his face and looked through the window. A guard, the first relief, was walking by outside, his carbine on his shoulder.

It would be the perfect chance for Cobb, Keller thought, feeling sick. He must have guessed that I know. All he has to do is see me coming. Then he could shoot me and claim I didn't identify myself. An accident. They'd investigate and hush it up, probably transfer him to another battalion.

Keller sat stupified, the fear riding him. God, I'm acting silly! he thought. How do I really know who killed that taxi driver? So Cobb was out of breath, so he had a guilty look on his face. Maybe he was in a fight in town. I don't have any proof that he did the killing.

And then another part of his mind whispered: you saw his eyes, you saw his face last night. He did it. Don't try to fool yourself. He did it. And he knows you know. And you've got to go down to that dark motor pool tonight and check him out.

Keller slammed his fist down on the desk. The dusk outside was deepening into darkness. A jeep rumbled by.

Keller closed his eyes, tried to shut out the insinuating voice in his mind. You can be killed tonight, it said. You can be shot down when you go to the motor pool. And there's no way you can escape it.

"I'm crazy!" he said aloud, and then, embarrassed, looked about to see if any of the guards had come in and heard him. But no one was there.

The telephone rang.

Keller jumped involuntarily, bumping his ankle on the chair. He bit his lip to ease the quick pain, then answered the phone.

"Captain Campbell, Sergeant," the voice drawled in his ear. "I'm turning in now, don't feel so well.

Remember to check the late relief in the pool."

This is your chance, that inner voice said. Tell him everything, all your suspicions about Cobb. He'll believe you; he'll investigate.

I'll tell him, Keller thought. I'll tell him! But then he hesitated, and he knew he wouldn't. Eleven years of taking orders, obeying them, never questioning, never alienating, froze his voice. "Yes, sir, I'll check," he choked out.

"Good night."

Keller hung up, his hand shaking. It's only a ridiculous fear, he told himself. Cobb didn't kill anybody; he won't be waiting for me. I've blown this thing out of proportion. It's a trick of the mind. I'm acting like a raw recruit!

He got up and went over to the window. At the far end of the street, an arc-light glinted on a helmet liner. The first relief, relieved, was returning to the guard room. Keller pressed his face to the cold glass, watching him trudge wearily through the soft-shining banks of snow. In two hours Cobb would be walking the motor pool.

Keller washed his face in the officers' sink. His head was blazing, almost as if he had a fever. He roamed about the desks and then sat down again, thinking hard. Not one mistake in eleven years. Caution combined with common sense, that had always been his secret. Old Play-It-Safe. He had survived two wars with that philosophy. And now, tonight, all of it wiped away. Just because that lazy do-nothing Campbell had given him an order, he had to put himself in a position where he might be killed. He lowered his head on his arms, using the desk top as a support. Well, he wouldn't go down to the pool. The hell with Campbell. If he checked and found out that he hadn't obeyed the order, well, they would have to court-martial him. His life was more important than that. Maybe Cobb wasn't involved at all; maybe it was just his imagination. But it wasn't worth taking the chance.

At peace now, satisfied with his decision, Sergeant Keller closed his eyes. He slept.

The telephone rang at eleven o'clock. Keller woke with a start, dazed and guilty. My God! he thought. How long have I slept?

He picked up the phone and answered.

"Captain Campbell, Sergeant. I just got a call from the M.P. Station. They picked up the man who killed that taxi driver. He's in our battalion, Charlie Company. They got a full confession from him. Found the money he stole."

Keller was still sleepy, but the Captain's words revived him. "What's—what's his name, sir?"

"Gruber, Huber, something like that. You know the man?"

"No, sir. I don't."

"Well, they have him in custody

and they're bringing him back here. We'll have to put him under guard until tomorrow morning. Take care of it, will you?"

Keller smiled. "Yes sir!" And then he remembered. "But I have to check on the motor pool guard. It's eleven, sir."

"Well—they should be here any minute with the prisoner. No, I guess it's all right. Check down there and then get right back."

"Yes sir."

Campbell hung up.

Sergeant Keller felt almost joyful with relief. I really went off the deep end there for awhile, he told himself. Funny what the mind can do, the way it can make something out of nothing. Buttoning on his heavy parka, he was suddenly glad that he hadn't mentioned anything to Cobb. He hated making apologies.

The battalion motor pool was only two blocks from battalion headquarters, a long, cold field filled with heavy equipment. Sergeant Keller ducked under the draw-gate and headed for the line of low sheds, the guard's area. He walked quickly, his hands thrust deep down in the parka's pockets.

A truck was drawn up behind the first shed. A few dark figures were rolling gasoline drums out of the shadowed building.

"Hey!" Keller called. "What's going on there?"

One of the figures moved away from the shed and Keller saw that it was Cobb. The soldier bent over one of the drums and picked up a carbine. "Halt!" he yelled.

"Halt hell!" Keller shouted. The gasoline. They were stealing the gasoline. And Cobb was helping them. He began to run toward the truck.

The night exploded. Keller saw the bright flash and felt the burning pain almost simultaneously. He staggered and fell in the snow.

Dimly, distantly, he heard the truck start and pull away. Footsteps crunched on ice, drawing closer. It was an effort, but Sergeant Keller opened his eyes and saw Cobb's face, the carbine smoking in his hand.

"You should've stayed in bed, Sarge," Cobb said mockingly. "Now look what I've done. I've gone and had me an accident."

But Sergeant Keller didn't hear him.

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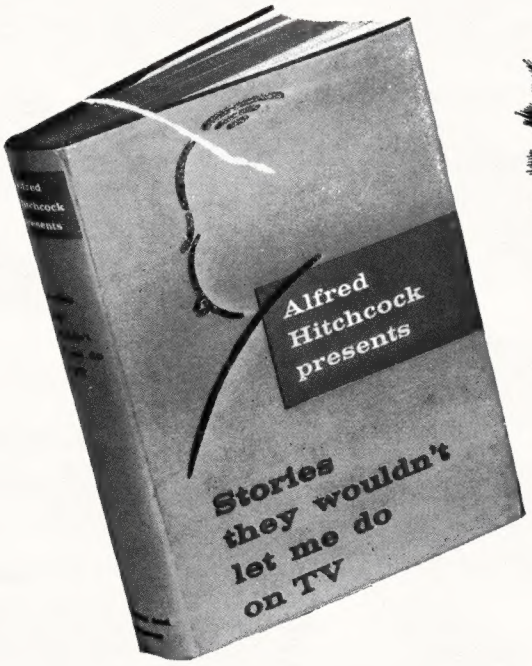

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